

ABIDING IN CHRIST THROUGH
PRAYER: THE PATHWAY
TO JOY-FILLED LIFE

Jeffery D. Van Dyke

BA, Asbury College, 1988
MDiv, Asbury Theological Seminary, 1992

Mentor

Michael A. Beck, DMin

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Dayton, Ohio
May 2023

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CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vii
DEDICATION.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS	ix
ABBREVIATIONS	xi
EPIGRAPH.....	xii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	5
Introduction.....	5
Context.....	5
Ministry Journey	13
The Synergy	21
Conclusion	23
2. BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	25
Introduction.....	25
Contextual Analysis	27

Formal Analysis	37
Detailed Analysis	38
Synthesis	43
Summary	45
3. HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	48
Introduction.....	48
Early Life	49
Young Adulthood.....	54
Key Moments.....	59
Societies, Classes, and Bands	61
Importance of Prayer.....	63
Conclusion	67
4. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	70
Introduction.....	70
Prayer: The Moravians and the Early Methodists.....	71
Prayer: Conversation in the Trinity.....	75
Prayer: Joining God in His Kingdom Work	77
Prayer: Abiding Communion with God.....	80
Prayer: Healing for Our Whole Body	81
Prayer: Clergy Life and Ministry.....	84
Prayer: The Importance of Prayer Partners.....	86
Conclusion	87
5. INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS.....	90

Introduction.....	90
Neuroscience.....	91
Neurotheology.....	92
Neuroplasticity.....	94
Contemplative Spiritual Disciplines and Mindful Meditation.....	95
Conclusion	103
6. PROJECT ANALYSIS.....	105
Introduction.....	105
Methodology	108
Implementation	110
Summary of Learning	114
Conclusion	135
APPENDIX	
A. SURVEY QUESTIONS	139
B. PRE AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRES	141
C. FOCUSED JOURNALING ASSIGNMENTS	143
D. FOCUSED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	145
E. MODULE TWO GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE.....	147
BIBLIOGRAPHY	153

ABSTRACT

ABIDING IN CHRIST THROUGH PRAYER: THE PATHWAY TO JOY-FILLED LIFE

by
Jeffery D. Van Dyke
United Theological Seminary, 2023

Mentor

Michael A. Beck, DMin

This project examined the state of joy in relation to practicing a devoted prayer life among United Methodist clergy in the Embarras River District of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference. The theme of this project is prayer. The problem this project researched is that clergy experiencing burnout reportedly lack joy. The project hypothesis is that if clergy practice a devoted prayer life, then clergy will experience joy. The project consisted of a survey, a pre-project questionnaire, a post-project questionnaire, focused journaling, and focused individual interviews to assess their practice of prayer and their experience of joy.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank the triune God for the abundant grace and steadfast love of God the Father, the abiding presence and unceasing prayers of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the gifts of joy and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. My mentor, Dr. Michael A. Beck, and my academic advisor, Dr. Rosario Picardo, thank you for your guidance and support. Susan Arnold, my peer associate, thank you for your prayers, encouragement, and friendship. My Fresh Expressions and Church Renewal Cohort, Susan Arnold, Aaron Kesson, Sarah Wanck, Larry Frank, Blossom Matthews, Heather Jallad, and Jorge Acevedo, thank you for your passion for Jesus and partnership in ministry. My professional associates, Dr. Alan Rhein, Dr. Robert J. Phillips, and Dr. Madeline Henners, thank you for your constructive feedback and encouragement. The people of Morrisonville United Methodist Church and the United Methodist Church of Nokomis, thank you for your prayers and support. Lastly, I thank the participants who faithfully participated in the study and assignments of this project. I could not have made this journey and completed this project without each of you.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to Sheryl, my loving and supportive wife, and my children, Jacob, Casey, Jeremiah, and Logan, who inspire me to be my best.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figures

1. Frequency of the Practice of Private Prayer	115
2. The Practice of Private Prayer has a Regular and Orderly Pattern	116
3. Duration of the Practice of Private Prayer	116
4. The Respondents Have Prayer Partners who Pray for Them.....	117
5. “I Feel Fulfilled in My Ministry”.....	118
6. “I Feel Overworked in My Ministry”	118
7. “I Feel Burned Out in My Ministry”.....	119
8. “Prayer Helps Me Keep My Life Balanced and Joyful”.....	120
9. “When I Pray, I Feel Joy”	120
10. “Through Private Prayer, I am able to Experience the Presence of Jesus”... ..	121
11. Frequency of the Practice of Private Prayer	122
12. Behavioral Change in Duration of the Participants’ Private Prayer	123
13. Affective Change in How the Practice of Private Prayer Makes the Participants Feel.....	124
14. Affective Change in How the Practice of Ministry Makes the Participants Feel	124
15. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “Abiding in Jesus”.....	125
16. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “Centering Prayer”	126

17. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “so that My Joy may be in You, and that Your Joy may be Complete” 127

ABBREVIATIONS

ERD	Embarras River District
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version

“It is in prayer that God’s love is released, and we learn to live with his love. Only through the life of prayer can God’s love gain more control over us and our love life. We must daily come and drink at the fountain of divine love.”

—Margaret Therkelsen, *The Love Exchange: An Adventure in Prayer*

INTRODUCTION

A devoted prayer life can be an effective means for clergy to draw deeper into the presence of Jesus Christ. The theme of this Doctor of Ministry Project is prayer, and the problem statement is that clergy experiencing burnout reportedly lack joy. The project hypothesis is that if clergy practice a devoted prayer life, then clergy will experience joy.

Ministry has many challenges that can lead clergy to experience burnout. Burnout is defined as “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job and is defined by the three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy.”¹ Burnout is also defined as an “emotional collapse or breakdown that sometimes comes as the result of chronic stress.”² Clergy often experience burnout.³ Burnout affects the

¹ Christina Maslach, Wilmar B. Schaufeli, and Michael P. Leiter, “Job Burnout.” *Annual Review of Psychology* 52 (2001): 397. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/job-burnout/docview/205845280/se-2?accountid=202487>.

² Abernethy, Alexis D., Gillian D. Grannum, Carolyn L. Gordon, Rick Williamson, and Joseph M. Currier. “The Pastors Empowerment Program: A Resilience Education Intervention to Prevent Clergy Burnout.” *Spirituality in Clinical Practice* 3, no. 3 (09, 2016): 177. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/pastors-empowerment-program-resilience-education/docview/1819911414/se-2>.

³ Laura K. Barnard, and John F. Curry, “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions.” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 2 (04, 2012): 149. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/relationship-clergy-burnout-self-compassion-other/docview/926558042/2?accountid=202487>.

professional satisfaction of clergy⁴ and creates personal complications.⁵ It usually develops gradually through a series of losses.

Burnout among clergy can be a result of stress that arises from a mismatch of the needs of the clergy, and the high expectations of the congregation.⁶ Other factors that can contribute to burnout among the clergy are work overload, the lack of self-care, and insufficient support.⁷ A study revealed that the shared experience of the trauma and stress of the COVID-19 pandemic between the clergy and the people was a contributing factor to clergy burnout.⁸

A study of 5,000 Protestant clergy discovered that 75% reported experiencing stress, which led to “distress, depression, frustration, and doubts regarding their vocational ability.”⁹ A study of 1,050 clergy discovered that “90% of participants reported frequent fatigue due to ministry-related stressors, almost 90% were contemplating leaving the ministry, and over 50% said would leave if they had other

⁴ Benjamin R. Doolittle, “The Impact of Behaviors upon Burnout among Parish-Based Clergy.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 49, no. 1 (03, 2010): 88. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/impact-behaviors-upon-burnout-among-parish-based/docview/198153786/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁵ Joseph D. Visker, Taylor Rider, and Anastasia Humphers-ginther, “Ministry-Related Burnout and Stress Coping Mechanisms among Assemblies of God-Ordained Clergy in Minnesota.” *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 3 (06, 2017): 951. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/ministry-related-burnout-stress-coping-mechanisms/docview/1879383047/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁶ Abernethy, 177.

⁷ Abernethy, 178.

⁸ Greene, Talya, Michael A. P. Bloomfield, and Jo Billings. “Psychological Trauma and Moral Injury in Religious Leaders during COVID-19.” *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy* 12 (08, 2020): S143. <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/psychological-trauma-moral-injury-religious/docview/2413197667/se-2>.

⁹ Abernethy, 177.

vocational options.”¹⁰ Another study of 80 Chinese clergy in Hong Kong discovered that “95% were experiencing varying levels of burnout or ministry-related stress in their roles.”¹¹

The first chapter describes the synergy of the ministry context and my personal narrative. It is essential to understand the needs of each ministry context and the interests and skills for ministry that I bring to the ministry context. Discovering and understanding the synergy between me and my ministry context helps me focus my work and energy in ways that are beneficial in addressing the needs of the ministry context and developing my spiritual well-being and ministry interests and skills.

The second chapter explores John 15:1-17 as a biblical foundation for the project. The abiding relationship with Jesus is a relationship in which the disciple lives in intimate communion with Jesus. As the disciple lives in an abiding relationship with Jesus, the joy of the disciple is made complete by the joy of Jesus in the disciple.

The third chapter looks at the life of John Wesley, with a particular focus on his prayer life. Wesley was a clergyman who was devoted to his spiritual formation and worked diligently in ministry. However, in his early years, he struggled to experience joy within his spirit. As he grew in spirit, Wesley came to understand the importance of prayer in experiencing inner joy through his relationship with Jesus Christ. John Wesley brings to this project a historical example of how a devoted prayer life can help clergy draw deeper into the presence of Jesus Christ and experience joy.

¹⁰ Abernethy, 177.

¹¹ Abernethy, 177.

In chapter four, we consider ancient and contemporary theological contributions that relate to the theology of prayer with a specific focus on Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement. Prayer is a vital spiritual discipline through which we can enter into the conversation and work of the Triune God and experience abiding communion. Through a devoted prayer life, we can experience the healing work of Jesus Christ within our whole being and nurture the joy of Jesus within our spirit.

The fifth chapter examines neuroscience as an interdisciplinary foundation for the project. The human brain takes in many negative and positive experiences every day, affecting the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person. Through the long-term daily practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines or mindful meditation, the human brain can heal, grow, and transform to help the person experience better mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

The sixth and final chapter describes and analyses the project. This project consisted of a survey, a pre-project questionnaire, a post-project questionnaire, focused journaling, and focused individual interviews to assess the practice of prayer and the experience of joy of the clergy who participated in the project.

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CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is fourfold. 1. I describe the needs of my ministry context based on the information and insights I gained from the Contextual Analysis of my ministry context. 2. I draw upon the insights I gained in writing my Spiritual Autobiography to describe my ministry interests and skills. 3. I describe how the connection between my ministry interests and skills and the needs of my ministry context shaped the foundation for my Doctor of Ministry Project. 4. I write about the general nature and content of my Doctor of Ministry Project by developing a theme, hypothesis, and general plan of implementation for my Doctor of Ministry Project.

Context

The context for my Doctor of Ministry Project is the Embarras River District (ERD) of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference of the United Methodist Church. The population of the ERD area in the state of Illinois declined 2.9 percent from 2000 to 2021 and is projected to continue to decline by 0.5 percent between 2021 and 2031. The number of households is also projected to decline by 0.5 percent during the same period.¹

¹ *MissionInsite*, QuickInsite report, Embarras River District, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

Households with children are projected to experience the following changes between 2021 to 2031. Married couples with children are projected to decline by 1.5 percent. Single-mother households with children are projected to decline by 0.3 percent. However, Single father households with children are projected to increase by 1.8 percent. During that same ten-year period, the populations of children from birth to 17 years and adults aged 65 and over are projected to increase. However, the population of adults aged 18 to 64 is projected to decrease.²

The ERD area in Illinois is very homogenous, with the largest racial/ethnic group being white non-Hispanic. There is an even mix of blue-collar and white-collar occupations in the ERD, with the median family income being somewhat less than the Illinois state average. The percentage of families below the poverty line is somewhat above the state average.³

According to information from the Embarras River District office, as of January 2022, there are 55 church charges consisting of 88 United Methodist churches in the ERD. The average worship attendance of churches in the ERD was 41.56 in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic and 32.25 in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic. In January 2022, these churches are served by 15 Full Elders, 2 Probationary Elders, 2 Full members of other Denominations, 1 Elder of another Annual Conference, 2 Full-time Local Pastors, 11 Part-time Local Pastors, 4 Retired Elders, 5 Retired Local Pastors, 1 Retired Associate Member, 1 Certified Lay Minister, and 9 Supply persons. Among these clergy and lay persons serving the churches of the ERD, 40 are male, and 13 are female. The

² *MissionInsite*, QuickInsite report, Embarras River District, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

³ *MissionInsite*, QuickInsite report, Embarras River District, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

average age of this group of fifty-three persons is 57.72 years, and the average salary is \$30,807.63.⁴

Following is the story of one United Methodist Church in the Embarras River District of the Illinois Great Rivers Conference that has a history that spans more than 126 years.⁵ The mission of this United Methodist Church is “glorifying God by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of (the community) and the world.”⁶

In February 2019, twenty-three members of this United Methodist Church were invited to respond to “The Unstuck Church” assessment survey produced by the church consulting firm, “The Unstuck Group,” as a means of assessing the current health of the church. When the responses of those who participated in the survey were tabulated, the results revealed that the church was in the maintenance phase of its life cycle.⁷ Tony Morgan states that common characteristics of a church that is in the maintenance phase of its life cycle include: attendance has plateaued or is declining, the church is inwardly focused, the vision for ministry has faded, ministry teams no longer work together, the church depends on the staff to do the work of ministry rather than raising up volunteers, and finances continue to be relatively healthy.⁸ Peter L. Steinke also comments about the characteristics of a church in the maintenance phase of its life cycle saying, “What contributes to the unhealth of a ‘maintenance congregation’ is low maintenance—neglect,

⁴ Pat Setzler, email message to author, February 8, 2022.

⁵ “(Name withheld for confidentiality) United Methodist Church 125th Anniversary Celebration,” booklet, August 18, 2019.

⁶ “(Name withheld for confidentiality) United Methodist Church Charge Conference 2020,” report, October 4, 2020.

⁷ “The Unstuck Church” assessment, (Name withheld for confidentiality) United Methodist Church, report, February 28, 2019.

⁸ Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 120-21.

indifference, helplessness, passivity, entrenched hostilities, rigidity, carelessness, low energy—essentially poor stewardship of the congregation.”⁹ In the life of this United Methodist Church, some of the characteristics described by Morgan and Steinke are evident, including attendance has been declining for the past thirty-four years, the church is inwardly focused, the vision for ministry has faded, neglect of an outward focus, and passivity in ministry into the community.

During the thirty-four-year period from 1985 to 2019, the average weekly worship attendance of the church declined from 170 to 73.¹⁰ The decline in attendance occurred gradually, and the church became desensitized to the decline and neglected to evaluate the fruitfulness of the ministries honestly. According to Thom S. Rainer, “This slow erosion is the worst type of decline for churches, because the members have no sense of urgency to change.”¹¹ For many years, the church members have watched the gradual decline hoping that the trend would change without the church needing to make any changes to the ministries of the church.

The church is now facing significant challenges in its present ministry during the COVID-19 pandemic, which began in early 2020. Where the church was in the maintenance phase of its life cycle in February 2019, the COVID-19 pandemic, with its health risks and restrictions on public gatherings, has moved it into what Morgan calls “the preservation phase” of its life cycle. Morgan states that the preservation phase of the church life cycle has these characteristics: declining attendance and giving, the inward

⁹ Peter L. Steinke, *Healthy Congregations* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006), xiii.

¹⁰ *Church Snapshot – (Name withheld for confidentiality) UMC*, report, <https://www.igrc.org/churchsnapshotdetail/196754>.

¹¹ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church* (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 13.

focus and preferences of the people are more important than the mission, there is a desire to return to the past when things seemed better, significant leaders and visionaries have left the church, decision making shifts from the pastor and staff to the lay leadership, and the focus shifts to keeping people happy to prevent them from leaving.¹²

The shift from the maintenance phase to the preservation phase of its life cycle has accentuated the unhealthy characteristics and practices already present in the church. The unhealthy characteristics and practices that are more evident in the church as it has shifted into the preservation phase include: attendance continues to decline, there is an inward focus, the preferences of the people are more important than the mission, there is a desire to return to the past when things seemed better, decision making is by the lay leadership, and the focus is on keeping people happy to prevent them from leaving and attempt to get back those who have left.

One need of the church is to realize that their ministries have become inwardly focused, and they have lost the vision and practice of being outwardly focused on the community to make disciples of Jesus Christ as they are going about their everyday lives in the common places of the community. Rainer states that churches “who refuse to accept their God-given responsibility to reach and minister both inside and outside the walls of the church buildings are on a clear path to decline and likely death.”¹³

There have been times in the past that indicate the church had an outward focus in their ministries with a desire to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the community. The outward focus of the ministry continues to be stated in words with the mission statement

¹² Morgan, 152-53.

¹³ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church* (Spring Hill, TN: Rainer Publishing, 2020), 34-35.

of the church, “glorifying God by making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of (the community) and the world.”¹⁴ However, the church is not living out the mission statement in the common places of everyday life.

The church needs to renew its biblical understanding and practice of the Greatest Commandment, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength” (Mk 12:30)¹⁵ and the Great Commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I commanded you” (Mt 28:19-20).¹⁶ Rainer states that churches who take to heart the Greatest Commandment and the Great Commission are churches that do not “just survive and live but instead thrive and grow.”¹⁷

The church has a public presence in the community, is located on a major street, and participates in community parades. However, there is very little engagement with the people of the community in the common places of everyday life. “Thriving churches have the Great Commission as the center piece of their vision,” states Rainer, “while dying churches have forgotten the clear command of Christ.”¹⁸ The people of this United Methodist Church may not have forgotten the clear command of Christ in the Great

¹⁴ “(Name withheld for confidentiality) United Methodist Church Charge Conference 2020,” report, October 4, 2020.

¹⁵ Mark 12:30, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

¹⁶ Mt 28:19-20.

¹⁷ Rainer, *Anatomy of a Revived Church*, 35.

¹⁸ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 40.

Commission. However, they are unwilling to apply the command to their everyday living in the community.

This United Methodist Church has become accustomed to times when attending a church was culturally expected and more common. However, that is no longer the culture's expectation and no longer common. The church looks to past seasons of fruitfulness and longs for a return to a time when people from the community responded well to the church's ministries. The church has neglected to notice the changing culture of the community and make appropriate changes in how it does its ministry to stay engaged with the community. Ron Crandall writes about the need for churches to be aware of the cultural changes of their community and the need to renew their ministries about every ten years to have continued health in the church and impact on its community.¹⁹ The church needs to become aware of the changes occurring in the culture to renew their ministries and become more outwardly focused and more engaged with the community.

A change occurring in the culture that the church is not considering is that young adults and young families are moving away for higher education and employment and are not returning to the community as was common in the past.²⁰ In the past, the church experienced a significant portion of its numerical growth from the biological growth of families in the church. However, the culture has changed, and the biological growth of families is no longer a significant contributor to the church's numerical growth.

¹⁹ Ron Crandall, *Turnaround and Beyond* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), xi.

²⁰ *MissionInsite*, QuickInsite report, Embarras River District, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

Another change occurring in the community, not reflected in the church, is the increasing number of lower-income families and single-parent families, especially single fathers raising their children.²¹ This reality is an opportunity for the church to consider new forms of ministry with this segment of the population that is being overlooked.

The present ministries of this United Methodist Church focus on the preferences of the church members to prevent people from leaving and attempting to get back those who have left the church. Tony Morgan states, “For churches on the downside of the life cycle, they’re not inclined to make any changes to reach new people if it means losing people who already attend church.”²² As the church declines, fear of making changes to ministries in order to reach unchurched people in the community causes the church to focus its energy and resources on keeping the people in the church happy to prevent them from leaving the church. “Any organization, including a church,” states Morgan, “that doesn’t focus on reaching new people has already started to decline and will eventually die.”²³

This United Methodist Church is at a point in its church life cycle that it needs to, as Jesus says in Revelation 3:2, “Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is at the point of death.”²⁴ There are significant needs in the present life of the church. It will require intentional desire and implementation of changes if the church is going to experience renewal in its spirit and ministries. There are times when churches face circumstances that appear impossible to overcome. However, we must remember what

²¹ *MissionInsite*, QuickInsite report, Embarras River District, <https://missioninsite.com/>.

²² Morgan, 128.

²³ Morgan, 129.

²⁴ Rv 3:2.

the angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary upon the announcement that she would give birth to the Son of God, “For nothing will be impossible with God” (Lk 1:37).²⁵

Ministry Journey

I am very humbled that the Lord has called me to pastoral ministry. The thought of being used by the Lord to proclaim His Gospel and nurture people in their spiritual development is overwhelming. I often feel like Moses when he heard the voice of the Lord calling him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. So many times, I too have asked as Moses did, “Who am I that I should go?” (Ex 3:11).²⁶ I hold onto the promise the Lord gave to Moses, “I will be with you” (Ex 3:12)²⁷ and claim it as the Lord’s promise to me also. Through the many years of my spiritual journey with Jesus Christ, the Lord has nurtured interests and skills within me that help me both in my spiritual discipleship and pastoral ministry.

One of the earliest interests the Lord nurtured within me is a love for reading and studying the Word of God. During the early years of my walk with Jesus when I was a teenager, I began to read the Word of God as a daily spiritual discipline. Before that time, I relied upon my Sunday school teachers and pastors to read the Word of God for me and teach me what it meant. After I came to faith in Jesus, the more I read the Word of God, the more I discovered about the heart of Jesus and the more I wanted to know Him.

During my education at Asbury College and Asbury Theological Seminary, the professors brought the Word of God even more alive for me. They helped me begin to

²⁵ Lk 1:37.

²⁶ Ex 3:11.

²⁷ Ex 3:12.

see the grand vision of God's biblical story. Where once I saw the Word of God as a collection of interesting stories, now the Lord was helping me see the Word of God as His grand story of grace and love in which we can hear the heartbeat of the Lord, who, as John writes in John 1:1, is "the Word."²⁸

As the Lord nurtures within me a love for reading and studying the Word of God, He also nurtures in me interests and skills to share the Word of God through the ministries of preaching and teaching. Regarding reading and studying the Word of God, Dennis F. Kinlaw says, "the important thing is that the Word of God comes alive for me, so that I can share it with others."²⁹ As the Word of God comes alive for me and the Word comes alive within me, the Lord helps me see the grand vision of the Word of God and hear the heartbeat of the Word. The more I can hear the heartbeat of the Word, the more the Lord nurtures within me the desire and skills to share the Word with people.

Preaching and teaching are more than skills to be attained by the pastor. They are spiritual disciplines through which the heart of the pastor can be transformed by the Lord. "The greatest problem in preaching," Kinlaw writes, "is not the preparation of the sermon but the preparation of the preacher."³⁰ The more I practice the spiritual disciplines of reading, studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God the more the Lord transforms me into the person He created me to be.

The practice of the spiritual disciplines of reading, studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God draws me deeper into the communion of the triune God, where

²⁸ Jn 1:1.

²⁹ Dennis F. Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1985), 11.

³⁰ Kinlaw, *Preaching in the Spirit*, 17.

the transformation of my spirit may occur. Michael Pasquarello III says, “Preaching is theology, a kind of discourse through which the self-communication of the Father is appropriated by the Spirit’s gifts of faith, hope, and love into a way of thinking, living, and speaking that is discerned and expressed with the ‘mind of Christ’.”³¹

As I am transformed in my spirit and drawn deeper into the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit through the practice of the spiritual disciplines of reading, studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God, the Lord increases my interest in sharing the Word of God with people so they may come to know Jesus Christ, who is the Word. James Earl Massey calls the practice of preaching a “burdensome joy.” The “burdensome” aspect of preaching for Massey is the work of the pastor in the preparation and delivery of the sermon which weighs upon the selfhood of the preacher. Out of this “burdensome” work of preaching comes the “joy” of preaching as the preacher sees the purpose of God and the redemptive work of God in the lives of the hearers who receive the Word of God with openness and faith.³² Barbara Brown Taylor writes of the practice of preaching as “a process of transformation for both preacher and congregation alike, as the ordinary details of their everyday lives are translated into the extraordinary elements of God’s ongoing creation.”³³ As I continue to experience the Lord’s work of transformation in my life through the spiritual disciplines of reading, studying, preaching

³¹ Michael Pasquarello III, *John Wesley: A Preaching Life* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), xviii.

³² James Earl Massey, *The Burdensome Joy of Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 13.

³³ Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1993), 91.

and teaching the Word of God, the Lord increases my interest and skills in sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with people.

Prayer is another interest and skill the Lord has nurtured within me. Over the years of my walk with Jesus Christ, the Lord has helped me mature in my understanding and practice of prayer. Where I once understood prayer as the means by which I asked the Lord for the things I wanted Him to do in my life, I now understand that prayer is God's invitation for me to enter into the holy conversation in the communion of the triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

The conversation of prayer is constantly occurring within the communion of the triune God. Paul writes of how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us “with sighs too deep for words”³⁴ (Rom 8:26) and how Jesus Christ intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father (Rom 8:34). Before I ever lift my prayers heavenward, the Lord is already praying for me. Kinlaw writes that prayer is the invitation from the Lord for us to join the inner conversational life of the triune God.³⁵ The Fourth Evangelist records in John 17 the beautiful prayer of Jesus Christ that gives us a glimpse of the inner conversational life of the triune God.

Prayer is one of the most, if not the most, essential ministries to which the Lord calls us. Oswald Chambers states the importance of prayer, saying it is “our only business” and “our holy occupation.”³⁶ In his letter to John Trembach dated August 17, 1760, John Wesley wrote about the great importance of scripture reading and prayer,

³⁴ Rom 8:26.

³⁵ Dennis F. Kinlaw and Christine Albertson, *Prayer: Bearing the World as Jesus Did* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2012), 1-2.

³⁶ Oswald Chambers, *Prayer: A Holy Occupation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers, 1992), 8.

“Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher.”³⁷ In prayer, we are drawn into the communion and conversation of the triune God, allowing the Lord to transform us as we listen that we may be faithful communicators of the Word.

Prayer is so important because through prayer, we join the conversational life of the triune God and access the power of God for spiritual warfare. Wesley L. Duewel writes about the role and power of prayer, saying, “Prevailing prayer is God’s ordained means for extending his kingdom, for defeating Satan and his empire of darkness and evil, and for fulfilling God’s eternal plan and bringing into effect his good will on earth.”³⁸ Alone, I am powerless to make any significant difference in the lives of people. However, through prayer, I gain access to the unlimited power of God by entering the ongoing prayer conversation before the throne of God.

Through prayer, I not only access the unlimited power of God, but I also remove all limits of time and space. Alone, I can only be in one place at a time, but through prayer, I can join with the Lord in what He is already doing and participate in ministry with other people at any time and in any place in the world. Duewel says that we can have worldwide influence through the ministry of prayer, making our presence count as a true partner in the Lord’s kingdom work.³⁹ I regularly go on prayer walks in my community as a means of observing and listening to become aware of the needs of people

³⁷ John Wesley, *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, vol. 4, (London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1931), 103.

³⁸ Wesley L. Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 13.

³⁹ Wesley L. Duewel, *Touch the World through Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 11.

and to hear where and how the Lord is inviting me to join Him in the work He is already doing in my community. It gives me joy to know that through prayer, my ministry becomes limitless as I accept the invitation of the Lord to join Him in what He is doing in my community and around the world.

Another interest the Lord has nurtured within me is developing connections with people through which I may be a witness for Jesus in our interactions. I call this the ministry of rubbing elbows with people in the common places of everyday life. In Acts 1:8, Jesus says that the Holy Spirit gives us the power to be witnesses of Jesus among people. If I am to be a faithful witness of Jesus Christ, I must pray to receive the power of the Holy Spirit so that the people I encounter in the common places of everyday life will see the Spirit of Christ within me.

Prayer is essential for the ministry of witnessing and evangelism to train disciples to join with the Lord in His work of bringing the kingdom of God near to the people we meet in the common places of everyday life. As Jesus sent seventy disciples ahead of him to the places he intended to go, He instructed them saying, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest” (Lk 10:2).⁴⁰ Prayer prepares my heart to follow Jesus as I am going among the people in the common places of everyday life.

Prayer is also vital for the ministry of witnessing and evangelism to prepare the hearts of people to receive Jesus Christ. Jesus teaches about the different levels of receptivity of people to the gospel in the parable of the sower (Mt 13:1-9, 18-23). Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that it is only by the Holy Spirit that any person can proclaim

⁴⁰ Lk 10:2.

Jesus is Lord. It is through the prevenient grace of God that the Holy Spirit awakens the spirit of a person so that they may be receptive to hearing the gospel and come to faith in Jesus Christ. Before I share the gospel of Jesus with people, I must first pray for the Holy Spirit to prepare their hearts to be receptive to Jesus. Ed Silvoso calls this “prayer evangelism,” in which I pray to God for people before I talk with people about God.⁴¹ According to Silvoso, praying for people is how we can touch a person at the deepest level of their heart.⁴² Prayer prepares the hearts of the people to be receptive to Jesus.

The ministry of discipleship is another interest and skill the Lord has nurtured within me. Where the ministry of rubbing elbows with people in the common places of everyday life provides an opportunity for daily witness with people, the ministry of discipleship provides the opportunity to nurture those who have come to faith in Jesus more deeply in their walk with Jesus. Concerning this movement from evangelism to discipleship, Michael Moynagh writes that having begun with evangelism, we then continue with the ministry of discipleship to connect people to God’s family so that they will be nurtured and supported on their journey of faith and continued discipleship.⁴³

In the Gospels, we see Jesus model the ministry of discipleship as He calls the small group of twelve disciples to walk with Him daily in the common places of everyday life that they may learn from Him about the kingdom of God and share the Good News as they interact with the people they meet. Harold W. Burgess writes that

⁴¹ Ed Silvoso, *Prayer Evangelism* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), 35.

⁴² Silvoso, 45.

⁴³ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012), 337.

from the time of Jesus and the first twelve disciples, small groups have been important in the ongoing teaching ministries of the church.⁴⁴

In our Methodist heritage, John Wesley understood the importance of small groups for the ongoing nurturing and training of Christians.⁴⁵ Wesley's goal of the small groups, which he called "class meetings," was for people to experience, "real, and lasting life change through faith in Jesus Christ," writes Roger Ross.⁴⁶ One objective of discipleship, according to Allan Coppedge, is for people to learn to live in the constant presence of Jesus and cultivate their relationship with Jesus.⁴⁷ Robert E. Coleman writes that the ministry of discipleship is for the ongoing process of learning and being conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.⁴⁸ One thing I have realized about the significant people who have influenced me in my spiritual and professional development is that I may not remember very many of the specific lessons or sermons through which they taught me about Jesus Christ, but I do remember how I experienced the presence and love of Jesus Christ by being present and interacting with them.

Discipleship ministries can occur in small groups of varying sizes, whether in a group in size like the first twelve disciples or as small as the two disciples who walked together to the village of Emmaus following the resurrection of Jesus (Luke 24:13-35). The ministry of discipleship is the life-long walk disciples travel with Jesus and each

⁴⁴ Harold W. Burgess, *The Role of Teaching in Sustaining the Church* (Anderson, IN: Bristol House, Ltd, 2004), 78.

⁴⁵ Burgess, 79.

⁴⁶ Roger Ross, *Meet the Good People* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), xii.

⁴⁷ Allan Coppedge, *The Biblical Principles of Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 48.

⁴⁸ Robert E. Coleman, *The Heart of the Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 219.

other. On this walk of discipleship, they may mature in faith and encourage one another as they are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

The Synergy

I now describe how the connection between my ministry interests and skills and the needs of my ministry context shape the foundation for my Doctor of Ministry Project. In reviewing my Contextual Analysis, I have identified dynamics within the ERD that can be contributing factors in clergy burnout. First, there are more churches than clergy, meaning that some clergy are provide pastoral ministry to more than one church. Second, the population of the ERD is declining and aging, which can affect the attendance levels of the churches. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused more decline in worship attendance and increased pressure on the clergy to find new ways of leading ministry.

Along with these factors that can lead to clergy burnout, I have also identified dynamics within one United Methodist Church of the Embarras River District that can contribute to clergy burnout. First, the church is inwardly focused on the preferences of the church members. This inward focus is a means to keep people happy to sustain the church by preventing people from leaving.

Second, this inward focus has caused the church to neglect an outward focus on the community. The church needs to regain a biblical understanding and implementation of the Greatest Commandment and the Great Commission.

Third, by lacking an outward focus on the community, the church is neglecting to notice and consider changes occurring in the culture of the community. The church is

neglecting to see the needs of people in the community and make connections with people to provide a witness of faith among the people.

In my Spiritual Autobiography, I have discovered four ministerial interests and skills that are important to me. I will now describe how I think my ministerial interests and skills will serve well to address the needs of clergy and churches like the United Methodist Church described above.

First, my interest and skills in reading, studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God will help people regain a biblical understanding and practice of prayer. The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:11-13, “The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”⁴⁹ My interest and skills in reading, studying, preaching and teaching the Word of God will help people mature in their faith and the practice of prayer.

Second, my interest and skills in the ministry of prayer will help people enter the prayer conversation of the triune God to listen to the heart of the Lord. Through the ministry of prayer, I will help the people discover the limitless power of prayer that spans time and space, allowing us to join the Lord in his kingdom work at any time and in any place in the world. I will invite the people to go on prayer walks in our community so that we may observe the context of the community to become aware of the needs of people, listen to the prayer conversation of the triune God for the people, and observe where and

⁴⁹ Eph 4:11-13.

in what ways the Lord is inviting us to join Him where He is already working in the community.

Third, my interests and skills for the ministry of witness and evangelism will help people learn to make connections and share faith in Jesus Christ with people as we go and bring the kingdom of God near among people in the common places of everyday life.

Fourth, my interests and skills for the ministry of discipleship will help people learn the ongoing ministry of walking with people in the long journey of following Jesus so that we may encourage one another and experience joy as we mature in our faith to be conformed to the image of Jesus.

Conclusion

Pastoral ministry has many challenges that can lead clergy to experience burnout. A devoted prayer life can be an effective means for clergy to draw deeper into the presence of Jesus Christ and experience joy. The ERD clergy experience many challenges in ministry that can lead to burnout. The general nature and content of this Doctor of Ministry Project were to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes resulting in the experience of joy among the clergy of the ERD by having participants practice centering prayer. I hoped that through the study and practice of centering prayer, the clergy would experience joy.

In the next chapter, we will consider the pericope John 15:1-17 to discover what it teaches about how the joy of Jesus Christ is experienced by the disciple who lives in an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ. This pericope has significant implications for clergy who do not experience joy because they are overworked and stressed. A devoted

prayer life is an essential means of grace that helps clergy live in an intimate, abiding relationship with Jesus Christ and experience joy in their life and ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

I chose the pericope of John 15:1-17 for the biblical foundations of my Doctor of Ministry Project.

John 15:1-17

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my

name.¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.¹

In this chapter, I present my exegetical research of John 15:1-17. I first present a contextual analysis of the pericope's historical and literary context. Second, I write a formal analysis considering the form, structure, and movement of John 15:1-17, followed by a detailed analysis of John 15:1-17. Fourth, I synthesize the pericope from the findings of my contextual, formal, and detailed analyses. Last, I include a summary that describes how John 15:1-17 provides a biblical foundation for this Doctor of Ministry Project.

John 15:1-17 is a pericope within what is commonly called the Farewell Discourse of John 14:1-16:33. The pericope is one of the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. In John 15:1, Jesus proclaims, “I am the true vine.”² In the pericope, Jesus teaches about the abiding life to which He calls His disciples. Jesus exemplifies the abiding life by His abiding life with the Father. The abiding life is a life of loving obedience with Jesus in which the disciples bear the fruit of mutual love for one another. As disciples bear the fruit of mutual love, they glorify the Father. The reason Jesus teaches about and calls the disciples to the abiding life is that He wants His joy to be in the disciples. As the disciples experience the joy of Jesus, the joy of the disciples is made complete. The themes of John 15:1-17 that I researched and wrote about are: “I Am,” vine, vine grower, prune/cleanse, abiding in Jesus, bearing fruit, mutual love, obedience, prayer, and joy.

¹ Jn 15:1-17.

² Jn 15:1.

Contextual Analysis

Discovering the historical context of the Gospel of John is an ongoing work of scholars. As I write about the historical context of the Gospel of John, I consider the authorship, date, place of origin, the relationship between the Gospel of John and the Synoptic Gospels, and the purpose of the Gospel of John.

The identity of the Gospel of John's author has long been debated by scholars, as the Gospel of John does not name an author. Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, provides the earliest written comment regarding the authorship of the Gospel of John.³ Irenaeus believed that John, the disciple of Jesus and the son of Zebedee, was the author,⁴ but scholars have raised doubts concerning the claims made by Irenaeus.⁵

In John 19:35 and 21:24, the Beloved Disciple is indirectly indicated as being responsible for the writing of the Gospel of John. The author of John 19:35 and 21:24 seems to indicate that the Gospel of John, while not written directly by the Beloved Disciple, is based upon the testimony and writings of the Beloved Disciple.⁶

It is commonly understood that the Beloved Disciple was a person who was a follower of Jesus but not one of the twelve disciples.⁷ In the Gospel of John, only Lazarus

³ David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2018), 341.

⁴ Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. et al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 369.

⁵ deSilva, 341-42.

⁶ Leander E. Keck, ed. et al. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9, Luke-John (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 500.

⁷ Green, 370.

is directly identified as the one whom Jesus loved (11:3, 36). This detail has led some scholars to think that Lazarus may have been the Beloved Disciple.⁸

Scholars have presented various other theories of the authorship of the Gospel of John. One theory is that the Beloved Disciple may have used a scribe to compose the Gospel of John. A second theory is that a disciple of the Beloved Disciple may have written the Gospel of John based on the Beloved Disciple's writings. A third theory is that the Johannine community may have written the Gospel of John based on the Beloved Disciple's theology and teachings studied within the Johannine community.⁹ A fourth theory is that the present form of the Gospel of John is the work of a redactor who used as source material the unorganized manuscript pages of the unknown original author.¹⁰ In this paper, I will refer to the author of the Gospel of John as the Fourth Evangelist, a reference commonly used by scholars.¹¹

The date of the writing of the Gospel of John cannot be definitively stated. Scholars have suggested various ranges of the date, beginning as early as 75 CE¹² to as late as 110 CE.¹³ That said, the date range that scholars widely accept is 90-100 CE.¹⁴

⁸ deSilva, 343.

⁹ J.D. Douglas, ed. et al., *New Bible Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 610.

¹⁰ Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, ed. and trans. George Raymond Beasley-Murray, Rupert William Noel Hoare, and John Kenneth Riches (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1976), 10-11, https://www.dropbox.com/s/tjjl8nz1e65hk65/bultmann_the-gospel-of-john-a-commentary-0664208932.pdf?dl=0.

¹¹ Keck, 502.

¹² Keck, 505.

¹³ D. Moody Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 43.

¹⁴ John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 961.

The traditional location of the writing of John is Ephesus,¹⁵ but Antioch, Alexandria, and a location in Palestine have also been proposed as possible locations of the writing of the Gospel of John.¹⁶

There are differing thoughts among scholars regarding the relationship of the Gospel of John with the Synoptic Gospels. Clement of Alexandria suggested that John was written to complement the Synoptic Gospels.¹⁷ Some scholars have noted basic similarities between Mark and John.¹⁸ There is a clear connection between the Synoptic Gospels, with the common thought that Matthew and Luke relied upon Mark as a source.¹⁹ However, the Fourth Evangelist wrote the Gospel of John with notable uniqueness from the Synoptic Gospels.²⁰ C.H. Dodd concludes that the Fourth Evangelist has relied upon an ancient tradition that is independent of the Synoptic Gospels.²¹

The historical context of the Gospel of John was a time of turmoil and conflict between the Jewish people who opposed Jesus and the Jewish people who believed Jesus was the Messiah.²² Following the destruction of the temple in 70 CE, a significant restructuring of Jewish religious life occurred,²³ and the power and influence of Jewish

¹⁵ Green, 371.

¹⁶ Keck, 506-07.

¹⁷ Green, 792.

¹⁸ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 31.

¹⁹ Green, 795.

²⁰ C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 18, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/CBO9780511554919>.

²¹ Dodd, *Historical Tradition in the Fourth Gospel*, 423.

²² Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 38.

²³ Keck, 504-05.

religious groups in Palestine diminished.²⁴ A struggle over religious identity and power occurred between the Pharisees, Priests, and the Jewish people who believed Jesus was the Messiah.²⁵

Out of this struggle began a practice of casting out of the synagogue people considered to be heretics of the Jewish faith.²⁶ The Gospel of John tells of incidents when the Jewish people who believed that Jesus was the Messiah feared expulsion from the synagogues (9:22; 12:42; 16:2).²⁷ J. Louis Martyn states that it is very likely that the phrases found in John 9:22; 12:42, and 16:2 that speak of putting out persons from the synagogue correspond to the *Birkath ha-Minim* (Benediction Against Heretics).²⁸

In this time of turmoil and conflict, it is essential to understand the usage of the term “Jews” within the Gospel of John. In the Gospel of John, the term “Jews” refers not to the Jewish people in general as an ethnic or racial characterization but to the Jews who did not believe Jesus to be the Messiah.²⁹ The Jews who opposed Jesus challenged Him concerning His role, authority, and mission.³⁰

The Fourth Evangelist states the purpose of the Gospel of John in John 20:30-31: “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the

²⁴ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 246.

²⁵ Keck, 505.

²⁶ Keck, 504.

²⁷ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 36.

²⁸ J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel*, Revised and Expanded (Louisville, Ky: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2003), 146, ProQuest Ebook Central PDF.

²⁹ Green, 371.

³⁰ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 35.

Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.”³¹

The Fourth Evangelist primarily writes to encourage Christians, especially Jewish Christians, to remain faithful in their discipleship with Jesus as they lived in the persecution from the Jewish people who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah.³² The message of the Gospel of John reassured the Jewish Christians that their belief in Jesus was genuinely Jewish.³³ The Gospel of John speaks to the generations of Christians who were not eyewitnesses of Jesus’ ministry³⁴ to encourage faithfulness to Jesus by reminding them of Jesus’ words concerning their life and mission as His disciples.

I will now consider the literary context of John 15:1-17 by researching the immediate and larger context. In the immediate context of John 15:1-17, the three preceding paragraphs of John 14:15-31 focus on Jesus speaking about the connection between love for and obedience to Jesus and the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit among and within disciples. The three paragraphs of John 15:18-16:4a that follow John 15:1-17 focus on the hatred of the world expressed toward Jesus, the Father, and disciples, with the promise that the Advocate, who is the Holy Spirit, will help the disciples testify of Jesus as they live in the world that hates Him.

In John 14:15-31, Jesus teaches that there is an inseparable connection between a disciple’s love for Jesus and the disciple’s obedience to Jesus’ commandments. A disciple who loves Jesus is a person who obeys the commandments (Jn 14:15), and a disciple who keeps the commandments is a person who loves Jesus (Jn 14:21).

³¹ Jn 20:30-31.

³² deSilva, 351.

³³ Keener, 247.

³⁴ Green, 372.

The love of which Jesus is speaking is more an action than it is an emotion.³⁵ John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, wrote of the vital relationship of love and obedience, stating: “At all times it is works and actions that we need, not mere show of words. It is easy for anyone to say or promise something, but it is not so easy to act on that word or promise.”³⁶ Disciples need God’s help to love Jesus and obey His commandments. Jesus promises the disciples that the Father will provide the help they need (Jn 14:16, 26).

There is also an inseparable connection between a disciple’s love for and obedience to Jesus and the abiding and indwelling presence of the triune God. The Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father sent to the disciples at the request of Jesus. Jesus says that, upon His request, the Father will give “another Advocate” (Jn 14:16).³⁷ By calling the Holy Spirit “another Advocate,” Jesus is indicating that He is also the Advocate for the disciples.³⁸ The role of the Advocate is that of one who helps, guides, encourages, comforts, and makes appeals on behalf of another.³⁹ The presence and role of the Advocate is vital for disciples as they live in the world that hates them because of their faith in Jesus (Jn 15:26). The Advocate encourages disciples to remember the work and words of Jesus and leads disciples into the whole truth of Jesus.⁴⁰

³⁵ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 275.

³⁶ Joel C. Elowsky and Thomas C. Oden, eds. et al, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, vol. New Testament 4b, John 11-21 (Downer Groves, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 136.

³⁷ Jn 14:16.

³⁸ deSilva, 374.

³⁹ Keck, 747.

⁴⁰ Barton, 987.

Jesus proclaims that love for Him and obedience to His commandments provide the setting for the abiding and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15), the Father, and the Son (Jn 14:23). Augustine, bishop of Hippo, wrote that the disciple who loves Jesus and keeps his commandments already has the gift of the Holy Spirit. When Jesus asks the Father to give another Advocate, who is the Holy Spirit, to the disciples, the Holy Spirit provides a fuller gift to help the disciples love Jesus and keep His commandments in greater measure.⁴¹

Jesus' teachings in John 14:15-31 about love for Him, obedience to His commandments, and the abiding and indwelling presence of the triune God in the disciples lead into John 15:1-17. Jesus speaks in John 15:1-17 about the abiding relationship of the disciples with Jesus — a relationship of love, fruitfulness, and joy. In John 15:18-16:4a, Jesus speaks about the relationship of the world to Him and His disciples — a relationship in which the world expresses hatred for Jesus, the Father, and the disciples who bear the name of Jesus.

While the disciples' love for Jesus and one another is rooted in Jesus' and the Father's love for them, the world's hatred for the disciples is rooted in the world's hatred of Jesus and the Father.⁴² The world hates the disciples, not because of the disciples themselves, but because of the disciples' relationship with Jesus.⁴³

Jesus describes the world as people who do not know the Father or Jesus (15:21; 16:3). In the immediate context of John 15:8-16:4a, Jesus is warning the disciples who were present with Him of the hatred of some among the Jews who do not know the

⁴¹ Elowsky, 137.

⁴² Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 287.

⁴³ Keck, 763.

Father or Jesus. Jesus indicates the immediate threat to the disciples by saying that the hatred of the world is to “fulfill the word that is written in their law, ‘They hated me without a cause,’” (15:25) and that they would put the disciples out of the synagogues (16:2).⁴⁴ In the broader context, Augustine suggests that the world refers to all persons who reject Jesus. In reference to 2 Corinthians 5:19, “In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself,”⁴⁵ Augustine wrote, “The world condemned persecutes; the world reconciled suffers persecution. The world condemned includes whatever is outside and apart from the church; the world reconciled is the church.”⁴⁶

Jesus’ promise of the Advocate in John 15:26 connects John 15:18-16:4a (the passage that follows John 15:1-17) with John 14:15-31(the passage that precedes John 15:1-17). In John 14:15-31, Jesus teaches that the Advocate will abide with and indwell in the disciples to teach and remind them of all Jesus has said to them. Jesus now teaches of another role of the Advocate as the One who testifies on behalf of Jesus (15:26). The Advocate also helps the disciples to testify on behalf of Jesus, and the testimony of the disciples is “the visible sign” of the Advocate’s witness of Jesus.⁴⁷

Jesus’ purpose of warning the disciples about the world’s hatred is so that the disciples will not be caught off guard and stumble when they experience persecution from the world. Jesus wants the disciples to understand the source and reason of the conflict of the world with them.⁴⁸ By knowing of the promise of the Advocate’s abiding

⁴⁴ Keck, 764.

⁴⁵ 2 Cor 5:19.

⁴⁶ Elowsky, 179.

⁴⁷ Keck, 765.

⁴⁸ Keck, 763.

and indwelling presence with the disciples in the reality of persecution from the world, the disciples will receive power to remain faithful to Jesus.

In considering the larger context, the Gospel of John focuses mainly on the ministry of Jesus in Judea and Jerusalem. There are a few incidents recorded about the ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1:43-2:12; 4:43-54; 6:1-7:9) and one incident that describes His ministry in Samaria (4:1-42).⁴⁹ The major Jewish festivals and the Temple in Jerusalem are important settings of the ministry of Jesus in the Gospel of John and are more significant than in the Synoptic Gospels.⁵⁰

The Gospel of John is comprised of a prologue, two primary sections, and an epilogue. The prologue (1:1-18) introduces the main themes of the Gospel of John: light, life, witness, truth, rejection, belief, glory, and Jesus as the revelation and presence of God. Some scholars think that the prologue was added to the Gospel of John after the primary sections were written.⁵¹

The first primary section (1:19-12:50) is commonly called the Book of Signs.⁵² This section focuses on the miracles and teachings of Jesus as he walked among the people in the common places of everyday life. The second primary section (13:1-20:31) is commonly called the Book of the Passion or the Book of Glory.⁵³ This section focuses on the passion and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Last, the epilogue (21) is thought by some scholars to have been added to the Gospel of John after the two primary sections were

⁴⁹ Douglas, 607.

⁵⁰ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 34.

⁵¹ Green, 373.

⁵² Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 22.

⁵³ Green, 373.

written.⁵⁴ The epilogue provides additional resurrection appearances of Jesus and a statement of authenticity of the Gospel of John as being the testimony of the Beloved Disciple.

John 15:1-17 is a passage within John 13:1-17:26, which is referred to as the Farewell Meal and Discourse.⁵⁵ The Farewell Meal and Discourse is composed of three units of which John 14:1-16:33 is the centerpiece.⁵⁶ The Farewell Discourse can be divided into four subunits: John 14:1-31; 15:1-17; 15:18-16:4a; and 16:4b-33. These subunits were composed by the Fourth Evangelist to interpret the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the future life of the disciples in relationship with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁷ In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus teaches His disciples the significance of His leaving and gives them hope for the life they will live as His disciples following His crucifixion and resurrection.⁵⁸

Within the Farewell Meal and Discourse, the Fourth Evangelist highlights in John 15:1-17 the importance of abiding communion with Jesus through which disciples will be enabled to accomplish the mission to which Jesus calls them. Without Jesus, disciples cannot accomplish the mission of the kingdom of God. The abiding relationship with Jesus provides the environment for the disciples to be cleansed and nurtured so that their lives and ministry will be fruitful and glorify the Father. Within the abiding relationship

⁵⁴ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 22.

⁵⁵ Keck, 719.

⁵⁶ Keck, 735.

⁵⁷ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 399, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520334>.

⁵⁸ Keck, 735.

with Jesus, disciples learn to live in love and obedience and experience joy even as they live and serve in a world that hates them because of Jesus.

Formal Analysis

I will now consider the form, structure, and movement of John 15:1-17. The genre of the Gospel of John is like the Greco-Roman biography, as are the Synoptics. The Gospels form a distinct group within the Greco-Roman genre.⁵⁹ The literary form of John 15:1-17 is metaphor.⁶⁰ Within the metaphor the imagery of the vine, the branches, and the vine grower refer to Jesus, his disciples, and the Father, respectively. Using these word pictures, the Fourth Evangelist communicates his theology of Jesus.⁶¹

The structure of John 15:1-17 can be illustrated in the following outline:

- I. Abiding in Jesus (15:1-11)
 - a. The true vine and the vine grower (1)
 - b. The work of the vine grower (2-3)
 - c. Disciples are to abide in Jesus (4-8)
 - d. Disciples are to abide in the love of Jesus and the Father (9-11)

- II. Loving as Jesus Loves (15:12-17)
 - a. Jesus exemplifies sacrificial love (12-13)
 - b. Love expressed through obedience (14-15)
 - c. Disciples are to go and bear fruit (16-17)

⁵⁹ Green, 282.

⁶⁰ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 279.

⁶¹ Keck, 756.

The movement of John 15:1-17 begins with the description of Jesus as the true vine and the Father as the vine grower (15:1). The Fourth Evangelist then describes the cleansing and pruning work of Jesus and the Father in the lives of the disciples (15:2-3). The vine metaphor is further described in terms of the abiding communion of the disciples and Jesus (15:4-8). The Fourth Evangelist continues by describing the obedient love of Jesus to the Father (15:9-11). Then, the sacrificial love of Jesus to the disciples is described (15:12-13), followed by the description of the obedient love of the disciples to Jesus (15:14-15). The Fourth Evangelist concludes the passage with a description of the work to which Jesus calls the disciples (15:16-17).

Detailed Analysis

I will now consider the details of John 15:1-17. John 15:1-17 is one of the “I am” sayings of Jesus in the Gospel of John. In the “I am” sayings, Jesus is proclaiming the Father’s name to the world⁶² and revealing His identity and authority with the Father,⁶³ who spoke the divine name “I AM WHO I AM” to Moses at the burning bush (Ex 3:14). Jesus uses imagery in the “I am” sayings that was common in the ancient Near Eastern culture to reveal who He is and how He can meet the needs of the human spirit and life.⁶⁴

In John 15:1, Jesus declares, “I am the true vine.”⁶⁵ The terms “vine” and “vineyard” were used in the Old Testament to represent Israel (Ps 80:8, 14; Ezek 15:1-18; Isa 5:1-7). In this Old Testament imagery, the people of God were planted and nurtured

⁶² Green, 355.

⁶³ Green, 356.

⁶⁴ Keck, 601.

⁶⁵ Jn 15:1.

by God for his glory, as they produce the fruit desired by God. Most uses of this imagery include pronouncements of God's judgment against the unfaithfulness of the people of God.⁶⁶ When Jesus declares He is the true vine, He is contrasting himself against false vines. In this imagery, the faithfulness of Jesus is contrasted with the unfaithfulness of the people of God.⁶⁷ As the true vine, Jesus provides what is necessary to produce the fruit God desires of His people.

God the Father is the vine grower (15:1) who removes the branches that do not produce fruit and prunes the branches that do produce fruit to make them more fruitful (15:2). When Jesus speaks of the branches, He is speaking of people who are already His disciples as indicated by the phrase "every branch in me" (15:2). The branches that do not produce fruit refer to disciples who do not bear the fruit in love.⁶⁸ The term the Fourth Evangelist uses for "prunes" also means "cleanses."⁶⁹ The pruning and cleansing is the disciplinary work of the Father in the lives of disciples. True disciples are those who have been pruned/cleansed by Jesus' word⁷⁰ and who abide in Jesus.⁷¹

The Fourth Evangelist uses the term "abide" to speak of the relationship of the disciples with Jesus Christ. "Abide" is the verb form of "dwelling place."⁷² The Old Testament image of God's presence dwelling among His people in the tabernacle (Ex

⁶⁶ Green, 867.

⁶⁷ Green, 868.

⁶⁸ Keck, 757.

⁶⁹ Keener, 293.

⁷⁰ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 283.

⁷¹ Green, 868.

⁷² Keener, 292.

25:8) and in the temple (Ezek 37:27-28) likely came to mind when the disciples heard Jesus say, “Abide in me as I abide in you” (Jn 15:4). The Fourth Evangelist writes about the “Father’s house,” “dwelling places” (14:2), and Jesus and the Father making their “home” with the disciples (14:23). As Jesus invites disciples to abide in Him, He is implying by means of metaphor that He is the new tabernacle or temple in whom disciples may experience the presence of God.⁷³

Abiding in Jesus Christ is what is necessary for disciples to bear fruit (15:4-5). The branch can only bear fruit by receiving the life-giving sap of the vine. Jesus teaches that disciples who do not abide in him can do nothing (15:5). Unlike branches that die as a cause of nature, disciples can willfully choose not to abide in Jesus.⁷⁴ In John 15:2 and 6, Jesus is addressing the problem that some disciples have either stopped or are in danger of stopping to abide in Him.⁷⁵ Disciples who choose not to abide in Jesus will no longer receive the life only He makes possible.

Obeying the commandment of Jesus Christ is the action that makes it possible for disciples to abide in Jesus (15:10).⁷⁶ The commandment Jesus gives is for the disciples to “love one another as I have loved you” (15:12). For disciples to abide in Jesus’ love, the disciples must live in mutual love for one another.⁷⁷ Bultmann writes, “To abide in love, which is demanded of the disciple, means continuing in the love he has received, in the

⁷³ Elna Mouton, "Torah Reimag(in)ed between σάρξ and δόξα? Implied Household Ethos in the Fourth Gospel." *Neotestamentica* 50, no. 3 (2016): 104. <https://doi:10.2307/26417622>.

⁷⁴ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 283.

⁷⁵ Fernando F. Segovia, "The Theology and Provenance of John 15:1-17." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 101, no. 1 (1982): 125. <https://doi:10.2307/3260444>.

⁷⁶ Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John*, 284.

⁷⁷ Segovia, 123.

state of being loved.”⁷⁸ Jesus exemplifies love by obeying the Father and abiding in the Father’s love (15:10). This love is mutual, sacrificial, and faithful (15:12-13) and is the fruit God desires the disciples to produce.

In John 15:7-8 and 16, Jesus Christ teaches that disciples who abide in Him and in whom His words abide can ask whatever they wish of the Father in the name of Jesus. Jesus’ promise is based on the unity of the loving relationship of the Father, the Son, and the disciples. Jesus prays in a manner that is true to the love of and in harmony with the Father. The disciples’ prayers should also be expressions of the loving unity of the Father and the Son⁷⁹ and in harmony with the will of the Father.⁸⁰ The abiding life is a key to answered prayer.⁸¹

Augustine wrote that when disciples abide in Jesus Christ and His words abide in them, disciples will pray in a manner that is agreeable to Jesus. If the Father does not answer the prayer in the manner of the disciple’s asking, the disciple must be asking outside of abiding in Jesus.⁸² “The intimacy between the believer and Jesus Christ,”

⁷⁸ Bultmann, 540.

⁷⁹ D. Moody Smith, *The Theology of the Gospel of John*. New Testament Theology (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 151-52. <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/CBO9780511819865>.

⁸⁰ Douglas, 960.

⁸¹ Lary M. Burton, “Johannine and Pauline Ecclesiological Metaphors: A Comparative Study” Order No. 9227153 (Phd diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1992), 47, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest One Academic, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/johannine-pauline-ecclesiological-metaphors/docview/303996570/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁸² Elowsky, 169.

writes D.A. Carson, “is an intimacy whose fruit is the result of prayer under Christ’s Lordship.”⁸³

In John 15:11, Jesus Christ states that the reason for having “said these things” to the disciples is “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.”⁸⁴ Jesus’ joy is rooted in glorifying the Father through His fruitful life of love and obedience to the Father.⁸⁵ Joy cannot be separated from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ,⁸⁶ which was the expression of His love and obedience to the Father on our behalf. Augustine wrote that the joy of God is never imperfect.⁸⁷ However, human joy is incomplete without abiding in Jesus, and the joy of abiding in Jesus is incomplete without love and obedience to God.⁸⁸

The joy of Jesus is His grace given to and received by disciples and is made complete by their living in abiding fellowship with Jesus.⁸⁹ The joy of Jesus is to become the joy of the disciple.⁹⁰ Joy is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22). It is not simply an emotion; rather, joy is a characteristic of disciples that is rooted in and received from God.⁹¹ It is

⁸³ D.A. Carson, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus: An Evangelical Exposition of John 14-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018), 72. ProQuest EBook Central.

⁸⁴ Jn 15:11.

⁸⁵ Carson, 67.

⁸⁶ Henry Novello, “The Robust Joy of the Christian Life.” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 91, no. 3 (07, 2014): 332, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/robust-joy-christian-life/docview/1634868393/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁸⁷ Elowsky, 171.

⁸⁸ G.J.C. Jordaan, “The Joy of Seeing Christ: A Thematic Study of Joy in the Gospel of John.” *Indie Skriflig*, 49(2) Art. #1968 (2015): 5. <https://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i2.1968>.

⁸⁹ Elowsky, 171.

⁹⁰ Bultmann, 541.

⁹¹ Douglas, 625.

made evident in both the inner attitudes and outward practices of disciples.⁹² The joy of Jesus is robust and endures through trials and suffering.⁹³ It is the result of love and obedience in the abiding relationship with Jesus.⁹⁴

The gift of Jesus' joy given to and experienced by disciples who abide in Jesus is complete (Jn 15:11), indestructible, and cannot be taken from disciples by anyone (Jn 16:20-24). The joy of Jesus assists His disciples in their witness and ministry no matter what circumstances the disciples may experience in the world,⁹⁵ as they look forward to living in the presence of Jesus Christ forever in the kingdom of God.⁹⁶ However, joy is a gift that can be diminished and lost by sin.⁹⁷ Adam Potkay notes that Martin Luther confessed a lack of joy in his life that he viewed as a spiritual problem that must be contended with in the life of a disciple.⁹⁸

Synthesis

Considering the detailed analysis, I will now synthesize my discoveries of John 15:1-17. In John 15:1-17, the Fourth Evangelist has recorded the beautiful word imagery Jesus used to describe the abiding life with Him. The abiding life is seen throughout

⁹² Adam Potkay, "Spenser, Donne, and the Theology of Joy." *Sel Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 46, no. 1 (2006): 44. <https://go-gale-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/ps/i.do?p=AONE&id=GALE|A143569176&v=2.1&it=r&sid=oclc>.

⁹³ Novello, 331.

⁹⁴ Dirk G. van der Merwe, "The Christian Spirituality of the Love of God: Conceptual and Experiential Perspectives Emanating from the Gospel of John." *Verbum Et Ecclesia* 41, no. 1 (2020): 8. <https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v41i1.2130>.

⁹⁵ Green, 396.

⁹⁶ Douglas, 625.

⁹⁷ Douglas, 625.

⁹⁸ Potkay, 48-49.

Scripture, in the creation story (Gen 1-2), in God's dwelling with His people in the tabernacle (Ex 25:8) and the temple (Ezek 37:27-28), in the Father and Jesus making their home with disciples (Jn 14:23), and in the new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:3). This abiding life is at the very heart of what God desires for His people.

The pericope of John 15:1-17 is at the center of the Farewell Discourse in John 14:1-16:33. In the Farewell Discourse, Jesus is preparing His disciples for life and mission as His disciples in relationship to and following His crucifixion and resurrection. Jesus assures His disciples of the indwelling presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with them (14:15-31) as His disciples live in the world that hates them because of Jesus (15:18-16:4a).

Jesus states His purpose for teaching about the abiding life in John 15:11: "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."⁹⁹ Jesus wants His disciples to experience His joy, which will make their joy complete. Even as His disciples live and serve in the mission of His kingdom in a world that hates them because of the name of Jesus, His disciples can experience the joy of Jesus.

The disciples' joy is made complete as they abide in Jesus, the true vine, who is the source of true life. His disciples are empowered to live the abiding life through the very life of Jesus as He lives in the abiding life with the Father.

In Jesus' abiding life with the Father, the Father and Jesus express mutual love. In their love for one another, Jesus desires to live in obedience to His Father's will. The joy

⁹⁹ Jn 15:11.

of Jesus comes from Him receiving the love of the Father and glorifying the Father through His love and obedience for the Father.

Jesus calls His disciples to abide in Him so that they may live in the abiding life of Jesus and the Father. As disciples abide in Jesus, the Father does His cleansing work in their lives so that the disciples will bear more fruit (15:2). The fruit the disciples are to bear is the love of Jesus, which empowers them to love one another (15:12, 17).

As disciples abide in Jesus and in His love, the desire of Jesus to glorify the Father through His love for and obedience to the Father grows within the disciples. The desire of the disciples to obey the command of Jesus is not compulsive.¹⁰⁰ Rather, the desire of the disciples to obey Jesus springs forth from the joy of Jesus within the heart of the disciples as they live to glorify the Father. The hearts of the disciples are transformed through the abiding life with Jesus, their desires become as Jesus desires, and they learn to pray in the manner of the Father's will.

Summary

The abiding relationship with Jesus is a relationship in which the disciple lives in intimate communion with Jesus. Jesus exemplifies this intimate communion in His abiding relationship with the Father. In their abiding relationship, the Father and Jesus share mutual love for one another. Because of the Father's love for Jesus and His love for

¹⁰⁰ Jongseon Kwon, "A Rhetorical Analysis of the Johannine Farewell Discourse" Order No. 9324753 (Phd diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993), 152-53, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest One Academic, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/rhetorical-analysis-johannine-farewell-discourse/docview/304071444/se-2?accountid=202487>.

the Father, Jesus lives in obedience to the will of the Father. In His loving obedience to the Father, Jesus glorifies the Father, which is the joy of Jesus.

The disciple who lives in the abiding relationship with Jesus experiences the love of the Father and Jesus. In the Father's love for the disciple, the Father prunes/cleanses the life of the disciple so that the disciple may be more fruitful in his or her discipleship.

Because of Jesus' love, the disciple desires to express his or her love to Jesus through loving obedience to Jesus' commandment that the disciples are to love one another. The mutual love of the disciples is the fruit the Father desires the disciples to bear more abundantly in their lives. The only way the disciple can bear the fruit of mutual love is to live in an abiding relationship with Jesus.

As the disciple lives in an abiding relationship with Jesus, Jesus' desire to glorify the Father through loving obedience to the Father becomes the desire of the disciple. By loving Jesus and desiring what Jesus desires, the disciple prays in harmony with the will of the Father and in the authority of the name of Jesus. As the Father is glorified by the loving obedience of and the mutual love among the disciples, the joy of the disciple is made complete by the joy of Jesus in the disciple.

John 15:1-17 has significant implications for clergy who do not experience joy because they are overworked and stressed. The work of ministry is overwhelming and never-ending. One temptation for clergy is to focus upon the work of ministry out of a desire to be successful or to at least look successful in the eyes of peers and congregants. Another temptation for clergy is to try to meet the needs of all the people out of a genuine concern for people. When clergy become so focused upon the work of ministry that they believe they must accomplish, they often neglect their relationship with Jesus. When

clergy do not live in an abiding relationship with Jesus, they do not experience joy in their life or ministry.

John 15:1-17 provides a good biblical foundation for this Doctor of Ministry Project by reminding us of the importance of living in an abiding relationship with Jesus. It is in an abiding relationship with Jesus that a disciple experiences Jesus' joy in life and ministry. I believe that a devoted prayer life is a vital means of grace that helps clergy live in an abiding relationship with Jesus. The desire to experience joy is a longing within the heart of every person. When a person experiences Jesus' joy nurtured in the abiding relationship with Jesus, the person is compelled to abide even more deeply in Jesus.¹⁰¹ Clergy who practice a devoted prayer life will abide more deeply in Jesus. As clergy abide more deeply in Jesus, they will experience the joy of Jesus, which will make their joy complete.

In the next chapter, we will explore the life of John Wesley. In his early life, Wesley struggled to experience joy in his life and ministry. As he grew in spirit, prayer became an important means of grace through which Wesley drew deeper into an abiding relationship with Jesus Christ and experienced inner peace and joy.

¹⁰¹ Jay Grave, "The Joy of the Lord is Your Strength: How Your Passions Can Serve God's Mission in the World" (DMin Theses, Luther Seminary, 2016), 58, https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1007&context=dmin_theses.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

John Wesley was raised in the Christian faith from the day he was born. Through his childhood, young adulthood, and adulthood, a desire to live faithfully to God was nurtured within Wesley's spirit. He put much effort and dedication into his spiritual formation and ministry. During his young adulthood, as Wesley strived to serve God faithfully, he struggled within his spirit to know the assurance of his salvation and the peace and joy of life with Jesus Christ.

Throughout his life, Wesley was blessed by the faithful witness and spiritual nurture of many people. His parents Samuel and Susanna Wesley, the German Moravians, Peter Bohler, and George Whitefield were a few of the people who influenced Wesley's spiritual formation.

John Wesley experienced significant life-changing moments when he attended a Society meeting at Aldersgate Street in London on May 24, 1738, and a love feast at the Fetter Lane Society in London on January 1, 1739. These experiences fanned the flame of the Holy Spirit within him and launched him into a fruitful season of life and ministry.

With an assurance of his salvation in Jesus Christ and the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit within his heart, Wesley ventured out into field preaching to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ among the people. As he preached the message of Jesus Christ

from town to town, he developed the Methodist movement of Societies, Classes, and Bands for the ongoing spiritual nurture of those who were responding to Jesus Christ.

John Wesley lived a prayerful life, and he called the Methodists to be a people of ceaseless prayer. In prayer, he wanted the people to pour out their souls to Jesus Christ and draw deeper into an abiding relationship with Jesus.

As I present my discoveries from my study of the life and ministry of John Wesley, I will discuss: (1) his Puritan and Anglican heritage and his childhood spiritual formation; (2) John Wesley's spiritual formation during his young adulthood and his years at the University of Oxford; (3) the witness of the German Moravians to John Wesley while on his missionary journey to the colony of Georgia in America; (4) Wesley's return to England and the witness of Peter Bohler; (5) his "heart-strangely warmed" conversion experience at Aldersgate Street in London, England; (6) his experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit during a love feast at the Fetter-Lane Society in London, England; (7) Wesley's field preaching beginning in Bristol, England; (8) his formation of the Methodist movement in the Societies, Classes, and Bands; and (9) the importance of prayer in John Wesley's life and ministry. I conclude with a summary that describes how John Wesley provides a historical foundation for this Doctor of Ministry Project.

Early Life

John Wesley was born in June 1703 in an Anglican Rectory in Epworth, England. He was the son of Samuel and Susanna Wesley.¹

¹ Ian A. McFarland, ed. et al., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 536.

His grandfathers were Puritan ministers who were nonconformists in the Church of England.² John Westley, Samuel Wesley's father, was imprisoned for one year for refusing to use the *Book of Common Prayer*. He was later removed from his ministry position at Winterbourne Whitchurch, Dorset for his continued failure to conform to the Church of England. Samuel Wesley changed the family name from Westley to Wesley.³

Samuel Annesley, Susanna's father, was removed as Vicar of St. Giles, Cripplegate, London for his unwillingness to conform to the Church of England.⁴ After he lost his ministry position in the Church of England, Annesley continued to preach at Little St. Helen's meeting house, Bishopsgate Street, London where he was known as a "patriarch of Dissent." Little St. Helen's meeting house became a center of London nonconformity where Samuel Annesley publicly ordained nonconformist ministers.⁵

Even though Samuel and Susanna Wesley were raised by nonconformist fathers, they were conformed to the Church of England before their marriage. They raised their children as devout Anglicans. The Puritan moral principles and spiritual disciplines they learned from their fathers remained an important part of Samuel and Susanna's faith and practice.⁶ Archibald W. Harrison described the Wesley home as having "a High Church atmosphere, yet it was essentially a Puritan home."⁷

² McFarland, 536.

³ Kenneth J. Collins, *John Wesley: A Theological Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 21-22.

⁴ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 14.

⁵ A. Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: John Wesley: Evangelist* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1978), 24-25.

⁶ McFarland, 536.

⁷ Wood, 26.

Samuel Wesley was an Anglican minister who served the Epworth, England parish from 1696 to 1735.⁸ He also took part in the religious society movement in England. The religious societies wanted to strengthen parishes and call people to live a godly and holy life. Samuel established a religious association in Epworth that focused on prayer, reading Scripture and discourses on religious matters, and the edification of their neighbors. There is no documentation that John Wesley participated as a young person in the religious association at Epworth.⁹ However, he was familiar with the purpose and methods of the religious societies and incorporated these ideas into the Societies, Classes, and Bands that he later formed to foster spiritual accountability and growth.

John Wesley wrote of his father's influence on him in a letter to "John Smith" dated March 22, 1748. He wrote, "My father did not die unacquainted with the faith of the gospel, of the primitive Christians, or of our first Reformers; the same which, by the grace of God, I preach, which is just as new as Christianity."¹⁰ John Wesley also noted some of the final words his father spoke while on his deathbed: "The inward witness, son, the inward witness; that is the proof, the strongest proof, of Christianity."¹¹ His father's statement had some influence on John Wesley's later understanding of the assurance of salvation.¹²

⁸ McFarland, 536.

⁹ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 24-25.

¹⁰ Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 2, 134.

¹¹ Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 2, 135.

¹² Wood, 27.

Susanna Wesley was a godly and spiritually disciplined woman who regularly practiced the means of grace and was well-read in devotional and spiritual literature.¹³ She taught her children to practice a devotional life of prayer with self-examination.¹⁴ The *Book of Common Prayer* was an essential source Susanna used for both content and to plan for her children's education.¹⁵ Under the spiritual nurture of his mother, John Wesley learned the "value of prayer and Bible study, moral values and frugal living, religion in the home and instruction of children."¹⁶

After reading an account of two Danish Moravian missionaries, Susanna was deeply moved, both emotionally and spiritually. This experience motivated her to use her gifts for ministry. In 1712, she became very displeased with the preaching of Mr. Inman, who was preaching at Epworth church while Samuel was away at convocation. In response, Susanna hosted evening services in her kitchen to better meet the needs of the people. The services in Susanna's kitchen consisted of singing hymns, reading prayers, and reading a sermon from Samuel's library.¹⁷

The Puritan and Anglican heritage John Wesley received from his parents remained an influence on him throughout his life. He had "nonconformity in his blood"

¹³ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 19.

¹⁴ John R. Tyson, *Praying with the Wesleys: Foundations of Methodist Spirituality* (Nashville, TN: GBHEM Publishing, 2019), 13.

¹⁵ Jerald Brian Selleck, "The Book of Common Prayer in the Theology of John Wesley," Order No. 8403899, (PhD diss., Drew University, 1983) 66, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest One Academic, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/book-common-prayer-theology-john-wesley/docview/303144339/se-2?accountid=202487>.

¹⁶ Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Prayers, Hymns, Journal Notes, Sermons, Letters and Treatises* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 5.

¹⁷ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 20.

but was committed to the Church of England.¹⁸ A. Skevington Wood describes how the influence of his Puritan and Anglican heritage was seen in John Wesley:

He remained a Church of England man to his dying day, with a strong sense of discipline and a desire to bring about reform from within. He loved the liturgy and was persuaded that the articles and homilies enshrined the essentials of the evangelical faith. Yet as he pursued his task of mission, we find him adopting expedients more in keeping with the spirit of his nonconformist ancestors. His overriding concern was for the good of souls, and where existing church order stood in his way, he did not hesitate to set it aside. The rebel under the skin would keep bursting through.¹⁹

In his childhood, John Wesley had been taught that he could only be saved “by universal obedience, by keeping all the commandments of God.”²⁰ In his young adulthood up to the age of twenty-two, Wesley’s religious practices were mostly outward and mechanical. He prayed, read the Bible, attended church, and received holy communion three times annually.²¹ Concerning his early years, Wesley wrote that he often thought about what he had been instructed concerning outward duties and sin. However, he did not remember having been taught about inward obedience or holiness.²²

¹⁸ Wood, 25.

¹⁹ Wood, 28.

²⁰ John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1978), 98.

²¹ Kenneth J. Collins and John H. Tyson, *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2001), 29-30.

²² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 98.

Young Adulthood

John Wesley earned a BA degree from Christ Church, Oxford in 1724. He was ordained a deacon of the Church of England in 1725.²³ It was in 1725 when he “began to show signs of genuine earnestness in his attitude to the Christian faith.”²⁴ He began reading about holy living in the writings of Thomas a’ Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, and Jeremy Taylor, *Rules and Exercises of Holy Living and Holy Dying*. These authors inspired his increasing desire to live in true holiness of heart and life.²⁵

In his letters to his mother in May and June 1725, John Wesley expressed his concern that the piety of Thomas a’ Kempis seemed to discourage Christians’ experience of joy. He stated, “I can’t think that when God sent us into the world, He had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it.” He argued further that if taking up the cross means that one must turn away from joy and satisfaction, then it disregards Solomon’s notion that the ways of religion are ways of delightfulness and peace.²⁶ Wesley also expressed his concern that a’ Kempis wrote that a Christian cannot know whether God has forgiven us or not before death. Wesley wrote, “But if we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is that every moment should be spent not in joy but fear and trembling; and then undoubtably in this life WE ARE of all men most miserable!”²⁷

²³ McFarland, 536.

²⁴ Wood, 39.

²⁵ Collins, *Conversion*, 30.

²⁶ Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 1, 16.

²⁷ Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 1, 19-20.

In addition to being influenced by the writings of Thomas a' Kempis and Jeremy Taylor, Wesley was influenced by Robert Nelson's *The Practice of True Devotion* and William Beveridge's *Private Thoughts Upon Religion*. As he read more about holy living, Wesley had a "spiritual awakening" and "understood for the first time that holiness is the end or goal of religion."²⁸

John Wesley earned a MA degree from Christ Church, Oxford, and was ordained a priest of the Church of England in 1727. He and his brother, Charles Wesley, formed a religious society made up of students for the purpose of practicing disciplines for spiritual development.²⁹ The disciplines, which were fueled by a strong prayer life, included: the study of the Bible, spiritual journaling, fasting, the Lord's Supper, and humanitarian acts of service.³⁰ John Wesley's years at Oxford were "a process of gradually deepening devotion and slowly mounting frustration as he sought to conform his life to the piety and morality he thought consistent with Christian discipline."³¹ He aimed at and prayed for inward holiness. He strived with all his power to keep the whole law of God, both inward and outward. He visited prisons, helped the poor and the sick, and did whatever good he could.³² Yet, Wesley lamented, "I could not find that all this gave me any comfort, or any assurance of acceptance with God."³³

²⁸ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 35.

²⁹ McFarland, 536.

³⁰ Tyson, 25.

³¹ Patrick W. Carey and Joseph T. Lienhard, *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Theologians* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Incorporated, 2000), 529, ProQuest Ebook Central.

³² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 99.

³³ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 100.

In October 1735, John and Charles left England to be missionaries in the colony of Georgia in America.³⁴ While sailing to America, they encountered storms at sea which caused John to be fearful of dying.³⁵ During one of the storms, John witnessed a group of German Moravians calmly singing hymns and praying.³⁶ The Moravians' faith and peace in spirit made a lasting impression on him. John Wesley wrote in his journal about how he was continuing to trust in his own works and righteousness and how "God in his free mercy" gave him the witness of the Moravians to show him "a more excellent way."³⁷

John Wesley was so impressed with the witness of the Moravians that he asked August Spangenberg, one of the Moravian pastors, for advice regarding his moral and spiritual actions.³⁸ Spangenberg asked Wesley, "Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?" Wesley wrote that he did not know how to answer. Spangenberg also asked, "Do you know Jesus Christ? Do you know that he has saved you?" Wesley replied, "I do." However, he later wrote in his journal that he feared "they were vain words."³⁹

John Wesley wanted to experience the assurance, peace, and joy he witnessed in the Moravians but struggled to know how. He wrote in his journal:

It pleased God of his free mercy to give me twenty-six of the Moravian brethren for companions, who endeavored to show me "a more excellent way." But I understood it not at first. I was too learned and too wise. So that it seemed foolishness unto me. And I continued preaching, and following after, and trusting in, that righteousness whereby no flesh can be

³⁴ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 17.

³⁵ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 18-21.

³⁶ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 21-23.

³⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 100.

³⁸ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 63.

³⁹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 23.

justified. All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air. Being ignorant of the righteousness of Christ, which, by a living faith in Him, bringeth salvation “to every one that believeth,” I sought to establish my own righteousness; and so laboured in the fire all my days.

In this vile, abject state of bondage to sin, I was indeed fighting continually, but not conquering. Before, I had willingly served sin; now it was unwillingly; but still I served it. I fell, and rose, and fell again. Sometimes I was overcome, and in heaviness: Sometimes I overcame, and was in joy. For as in the former state I had some foretastes of the terrors of the law, so had I in this, of the comforts of the Gospel. During this whole struggle between nature and grace, which had now continued above ten years, I had many remarkable returns to prayer; especially when I was in trouble.⁴⁰

In December 1737, Wesley ended his missionary endeavors in America and boarded a ship to return to England.⁴¹ When he arrived back in England on February 1, 1738, Wesley wrote in his journal concerning the struggle within his spirit. He feared that he was never “converted to God” and that he was “a child of wrath, an heir of hell.”⁴² In 1774, Wesley added disclaimers to these comments indicating that he did not believe the condition of his spirit was as “dark” or as “despairing” as he had thought when he wrote them.⁴³ Wesley wrote further on February 1, 1738 about the desire in his spirit to have the faith that is “a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I am reconciled to the favour of God.” He wanted the faith through which a person can know that “He is freed from fear, ‘having peace with God through Christ, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God.’ And he is freed from doubt, ‘having

⁴⁰ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 100-01.

⁴¹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 70.

⁴² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 75-77.

⁴³ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 78-79.

the love of God shed abroad in his heart, through the Holy Ghost which is given unto him;’ which ‘Spirit itself beareth witness with his spirit, that he is a child of God.’”⁴⁴

On February 7, 1738, Wesley met Peter Bohler, a Moravian missionary.⁴⁵

Between February 7 and May 4, 1738, Bohler and Wesley had conversations about the nature of faith in Christ, assurance of salvation, and peace. Bohler helped Wesley to believe that inner peace can be experienced.⁴⁶ Wesley wrote in his journal that he was amazed at Bohler’s teaching of the “fruits of living faith, —the holiness and happiness which he affirmed to attend it.”⁴⁷ Kenneth J. Collins states that Bohler taught Wesley “the two fruits that ever accompany saving faith: *peace* that flows out of a sense of forgiveness (justification) and *power* that issues from the regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit (regeneration).”⁴⁸

John Wesley continued to wrestle within his spirit, longing to know “true living faith in Christ.” In the days leading to May 24, 1738, he wrote that he “resolved to seek it unto the end,” by no longer depending upon his own works or righteousness, but rather by devoting himself to “the constant use of all other means of grace, continual prayer for this very thing, justifying, saving faith, a full reliance on the blood of Christ shed for me; a trust in Him, as my Christ, as my sole justification, sanctification, and redemption.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 77.

⁴⁵ Collins, *Theological Journey*, 80.

⁴⁶ Whaling, 19-20.

⁴⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 89.

⁴⁸ Kenneth J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 165.

⁴⁹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 102.

Wesley admitted that as he continued to seek this faith in Christ, he found within him a “strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and unusually frequent relapses into sin.”⁵⁰

Key Moments

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley “very unwillingly” went to a Moravian society meeting in Aldersgate Street, during which he had a powerful and life-changing spiritual experience that he described as his “heart strangely warmed.”⁵¹ He wrote of that moment: “I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation: And an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.” Upon his conversion, he began to pray for those who had “despitefully used” and “persecuted him” and testified of the faith he felt in his heart.⁵²

A few months following his conversion experience at Aldersgate Street Society, John Wesley had another extraordinary spiritual experience while attending a love feast at the Fetter Lane Society on January 1, 1739. He, along with his brother Charles, George Whitefield, and about sixty others, experienced an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Wesley described this moment in his journal: “About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy, and many fell to the ground.”⁵³ Stephen Seamands states that this experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit:

[...] catapulted Wesley outward and caused him, and the others there, to become other-directed as never before. Up until then, Wesley had been

⁵⁰ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 103.

⁵¹ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 103.

⁵² Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 103.

⁵³ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 170.

absorbed in his own quest for personal salvation. What happened at Aldersgate gave him deep assurance about that. Now at Fetter Lane, he was thrust out beyond himself, and the salvation of others became his burning passion.⁵⁴

On March 29, 1739, with this burning passion for the salvation of others, John Wesley accepted an invitation from George Whitefield to preach outdoors at Bristol, England while Whitefield visited America. Wesley was nervous about preaching outdoors without the familiar setting of a church building.⁵⁵ Upon arriving at Bristol, he began field preaching on April 2, 1739. Wesley wrote in his journal of that moment: “At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city, to about three thousand people.”⁵⁶

John’s brother Charles Wesley joined him at Bristol where they began to form religious societies.⁵⁷ As John and his ministry partners preached in town after town, they organized class meetings for the continued spiritual growth of the people.⁵⁸ They then formed religious societies in London that were the beginnings of the Methodist movement.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Stephen Seamands, *The Unseen Real: Life in the Light of the Ascension of Jesus* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2016), 126.

⁵⁵ Whaling, 22.

⁵⁶ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 1, Baker, 185.

⁵⁷ McFarland, 536.

⁵⁸ Michael D. Henderson, *John Wesley’s Class Meetings: A Model for Making Disciples* (Nappanee, IN: Evangel Publishing House, 1997), 28.

⁵⁹ McFarland, 536.

John Wesley preached more than forty thousand sermons.⁶⁰ He wrote some of his sermons not to be heard in public preaching, but to be read and studied for spiritual instruction. These written sermons were meant as resources to teach the Methodists in practical matters of faith.⁶¹

Societies, Classes, and Bands

As the Methodist movement took shape, John Wesley developed a network of Societies, Classes, and Bands for spiritual instruction and formation. The Methodist Society consisted of the Methodist people in a local area. The societies provided a learning environment in which the participants would watch over each other in love as they worked out their own salvation. The methods of the societies included: preaching, lecture, prayer, public reading, hymn singing, and exhortation.⁶²

The class meeting was a subgroup of the Society. Class meeting participation was required if a person wanted to remain a member of the society. A class meeting was a group of ten to twelve people who met every week for behavior development, including behaviors to avoid, positive behaviors to practice, and the practice of spiritual disciplines called “means of grace.”⁶³ The “means of grace” practiced in the class meetings included: the Lord’s Supper, baptism, reading the Bible, preaching, prayer, and confession.⁶⁴ The

⁶⁰ Paul Wesley Chilcote, *Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit: 52 Prayers for Today* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2001), 1. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/gqqugi7zbeq7wnqp/Praying%20in%20the%20Wesleyan%20Spirit%2C%20Pau%20Chilcote%2C%2045861976%2C%202145.pdf?dl=0>

⁶¹ Chilcote, 4-5.

⁶² Henderson, 83-84.

⁶³ Henderson, 93-112.

⁶⁴ Henderson, 134.

class participants would begin with prayer, sing one or two songs, and then each person would answer the question, “How does your soul prosper?”⁶⁵ The participants would spend one or two hours in the “labor of love,” listening to the responses of each person concerning the well-being of their soul. They would conclude with a time of prayer and thanksgiving.⁶⁶

In addition to the classes, the bands were homogenous groups based on gender, age, and marital status. Bands met weekly, and participation was voluntary. The participants were people who had a clear commitment to Jesus and “desired to grow in love, holiness, and purity of intention.”⁶⁷ Band meetings included: hymn singing, prayer, testimony, and confession.⁶⁸ The primary activity of the band meetings was to confess sin following the pattern of James 5:16:⁶⁹ “Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.”⁷⁰ Wesley wanted the band participants to be able to pour out their hearts without reservation⁷¹ so that they may confess their sin, pray for each other’s healing, and continue growing in holiness.⁷²

John Wesley understood the means of grace as the ordinary channels through which God conveyed his preventing, justifying, and sanctifying grace to the souls of

⁶⁵ Kevin M. Watson, *The Class Meeting: Reclaiming a Forgotten (and Essential) Small Group Experience* (Wilmore, KY: Seedbed Publishing, 2014), 26.

⁶⁶ Watson, *Class*, 24.

⁶⁷ Henderson, 112.

⁶⁸ Henderson, 117-18.

⁶⁹ Kevin M. Watson and Scott T. Kisker, *The Band Meeting: Rediscovering Relational Discipleship in Transformational Community* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2017), 84.

⁷⁰ Jas 5:16.

⁷¹ Watson, *Band*, 76.

⁷² Watson, *Band*, 92.

people.⁷³ He urged the Methodists to willingly practice the means of grace to draw near to God.⁷⁴ Wesley considered prayer, searching the Scriptures, and the Lord's Supper to be the most significant means of grace.⁷⁵

Importance of Prayer

Prayer was an especially important means of grace in John Wesley's life, even at an early age. Samuel and Susanna Wesley believed in the instruction of Proverbs 22:6 to train up a child in the ways of God. Susanna instructed her children to read, write, and pray.⁷⁶ She had her children reading the Bible, devotional readings, and the *Book of Common Prayer* by the age of five.⁷⁷ She taught her children the practice of self-examination through prayer.⁷⁸

Under his mother's instruction and example, John Wesley learned to live a prayerful life. His daily practice of prayer included rising at 4:00 a.m. to pray and meditate for one hour,⁷⁹ with his day divided into "fifteen-minute segments for prayer,

⁷³ Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers, eds., *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013), 73.

⁷⁴ Collins, *Sermons*, 67.

⁷⁵ Collins, *Sermons*, 73.

⁷⁶ Tyson, 7.

⁷⁷ Tyson, 10.

⁷⁸ Tyson, 13.

⁷⁹ Tyson, 45.

reflection, and personal accountability.”⁸⁰ It was his morning and evening prayers that were the heart of John Wesley’s devotional life.⁸¹

Wesley prayed for the people, especially those who needed saving faith in Jesus Christ. This was not a common practice of the Anglican priests of his time. People wrote letters requesting that he pray for their souls. The people appreciated knowing he was praying for them. Wesley believed that praying for people was a way of connecting people with the presence of Jesus.⁸²

Wesley’s prayer life was highly regarded. He instructed his preachers to practice a devoted prayer life with a daily schedule of private prayer every morning and evening, plus five in the evening, if they could.⁸³ In his letter to John Trembath, a Methodist preacher, Wesley wrote:

O begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or no, read and pray daily. It is for your life; there is no other way: else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty, superficial preacher. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow. Do not starve yourself any longer. Take up your cross and be a Christian altogether.⁸⁴

Wesley also expected his preachers to ask the Methodists if they practice family prayer.⁸⁵

⁸⁰ Tyson, viii.

⁸¹ J. Steven Harper, “The Devotional Life of John Wesley, 1703-38” Order No. 8212957 (PhD diss., Duke University, 1981) 337, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest One Academic, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/devotional-life-john-wesley-1703-38/docview/303136505/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁸² Jeffrey R. Hiatt, "John Wesley's Approach to Mission," *The Asbury Journal*, vol. 68, no. 1 (2013): 112, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol68/iss1/11>.

⁸³ Tyson, 45.

⁸⁴ Wesley, *Letters*, vol. 4, 103.

⁸⁵ Tyson, 45.

Wesley called upon the Methodists to be a people of prayer.⁸⁶ He taught the Methodists to pray every morning upon waking and every evening before going to sleep. He believed it was important for people to practice personal prayer, for families to practice a time of prayer together,⁸⁷ and for believers to practice public corporate prayers.⁸⁸

While he had a high regard for the Anglican liturgy, Wesley also practiced and encouraged spontaneous prayers.⁸⁹ Both written prayers and prayers of the heart were acceptable forms of praying for Wesley.⁹⁰ He encouraged the Methodists to use the *Book of Common Prayer* and Methodist hymns in their times of prayer.⁹¹

By 1730, Wesley was thoughtfully collecting prayers from other sources and rewriting them in first person for his personal devotional use. In 1733, this collection of prayers was published as *A Collection of Forms of Prayer for Every Day in the Week*. This prayer manual became another resource for the Methodists and influenced the devotional and prayer life of those who read it.⁹²

What John Wesley desired in prayer was that people would pour out their soul before God. Andrew C. Thompson states that for Wesley, “the true Christian life was a

⁸⁶ Andrew C. Thompson, *The Means of Grace: Traditioned Practice in Today's World* (Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2015), 54.

⁸⁷ Thompson, 58.

⁸⁸ Collins, *Theology of John Wesley*, 257.

⁸⁹ William M. Arnett, “The Wesleyan Conception of Evangelism,” *The Asbury Seminarian*, vol. 11, no. 1 (June 1957): 40, <https://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/vol11/iss1/7>.

⁹⁰ Thompson, 58.

⁹¹ Tyson, 45.

⁹² Harper, 113-14.

life of prayer.”⁹³ Prayer is a means of grace by which a person can have an encounter with Jesus and experience his presence, forgiveness, and acceptance.⁹⁴

The purpose of praying, in Wesley’s understanding, is not to inform God but rather to inform yourself. In praying, Wesley wanted people to become more aware of the desires of their hearts and their constant dependence on God who can provide for all their wants. Praying, Wesley wrote, “is not so much to move God, who is always more ready to give than you to ask, as to move yourselves, that you may be willing and ready to receive the good things he has prepared for you.”⁹⁵

Wesley believed that prayer removes life’s sadness and weariness and gives purpose and improvement to life. When prayer becomes part of every space of life, Wesley wrote that the person is able to say, “With me no melancholy void, No moment lingers unemploy’d Or unimproved below: My weariness of life is gone, who live to serve my God alone, And only Jesus know.”⁹⁶

He believed that “God does nothing but in answer to prayer.” When a person comes to faith in Jesus, it is either because of the prayers of that person or the prayers of others. Wesley wrote, “Each new victory which a soul gains is the effect of a new

⁹³ Thompson, 58.

⁹⁴ Tyson, 65.

⁹⁵ John Wesley and N. Burwash, *Wesley’s Doctrinal Standards: Part I, The Sermons, with Introductions, Analysis, and Notes by N. Burwash* (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing Co., Inc., 1988), 266.

⁹⁶ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 7, Baker, 35.

prayer.”⁹⁷ He believed that praying in agreement with Scripture was essential for prayer to be in accordance with the will of God.⁹⁸

Wesley viewed prayer as “a kind of spiritual respiration.” In the life of a Christian, Wesley wrote, “God is continually breathing, as it were, upon his soul, and his soul is breathing unto God. Grace is descending into his heart, and prayer and praise ascending to heaven.”⁹⁹ He believed that to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-17) was “the fruit of always rejoicing.” Wesley wrote, “He that always prays is ever giving praise, whether in ease or in pain, both for prosperity and for the greatest adversity.”¹⁰⁰ He wanted prayer “to become a way of life for the early Methodists.”¹⁰¹

Conclusion

John Wesley provides an example of how a devoted prayer life can help clergy draw deeper into the presence of Jesus Christ and experience joy. Wesley was a clergyman who was devoted to his spiritual formation and who worked faithfully and diligently in ministry. However, in his early years, even as he gave much effort to his spiritual formation and ministry, he struggled to experience joy within his spirit.

⁹⁷ Wesley, *Works*, vol. 11, Baker, 437.

⁹⁸ Barry Page Drum, “The Wesleyan Way: John Wesley’s Understanding of Christian Discipline” Order No. 3464011 (EdD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2011), 100, In PROQUESTMS ProQuest One Academic, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/dissertations-theses/wesleyan-way-john-wesleys-understanding-christian/docview/882871319/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁹⁹ Collins, *Sermons*, 160.

¹⁰⁰ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London, UK: The Epworth Press, 1948), 762.

¹⁰¹ Tyson, 45.

As he grew into young adulthood, Wesley's religious practices were mostly outward and mechanical. He strove to be faithful in his practice of spiritual disciplines and the work of ministry but experienced a growing frustration within his spirit. Wesley reflected on how, in his early life, he had been instructed about outward duties and sin but not about inward obedience or holiness. When he witnessed the Moravians praying with a spirit of assurance, peace, and joy during a storm at sea, Wesley longed to experience that assurance, peace, and joy in his spirit.

Wesley's spiritual life grew from being a practice of outward disciplines to an inner relationship with Jesus Christ. For Wesley, prayer became a means to draw near to Jesus Christ rather than an outward and mechanical work to earn salvation. He now understood the importance of prayer in experiencing inner peace and joy through relationship with Jesus Christ.

Wesley came to believe that the Christian life was to be a life of ceaseless prayer. He called upon the Methodists to make prayer a way of life. He instructed his preachers to practice a devoted life of prayer. Wesley wanted prayer to become spiritual respiration for the Methodists as the Lord breathes upon our souls as we breathe unto the Lord.

It can be a temptation for clergy to become more focused upon the work of ministry than upon relationship with Jesus Christ. When the focus is on ministry rather than on Jesus Christ, the work of ministry can become burdensome and joyless. As such, John Wesley instructed his preachers not to starve themselves spiritually by neglecting daily prayer and Scripture reading. When clergy practice a devoted life of ceaseless prayer, they will abide more deeply in the presence of Jesus Christ and experience the joy of Jesus. John Wesley grew in his spirit and experienced joy as he breathed in the Spirit

of Christ more deeply through his devoted life of prayer. He believed that the Christian who lives a devoted life of ceaseless prayer will give praise to the Lord in all circumstances.

In the next chapter, we will explore the theology of prayer. We will begin by considering the theology of prayer of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement, and how it influenced John Wesley. We will then broaden our exploration of the theology of prayer.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, we will consider ancient and contemporary theological contributions that relate to prayer and provide the theological foundations for this Doctor of Ministry Project. First, I describe the importance of the spiritual practice of prayer in the lives of the Moravians and the early Methodists. The spiritual practice of prayer was an important discipline in the lives of the Moravians, and prayer was at the heart of their life with God and each other. For the Moravians, life and ministry flowed out of an abiding communion with God in prayer. John Wesley was significantly influenced by the Moravians' prayer life. As John Wesley developed a deeper spiritual practice of prayer, he discipled the early Methodists in the spiritual practice of prayer.

Second, I convey prayer as an ongoing conversation in the Trinity into which the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit invite us to participate. In prayer, we listen to the conversation of the Trinity as well as join the conversation with the prayers from our hearts. Learning to live in this conversation of prayer with the Trinity is vitally important in the life and ministry of clergy.

Third, I describe prayer as a means of joining God in His kingdom work. Prayer is the greatest work of the disciple of Jesus Christ. Through prayer, we join the triune God in the ongoing kingdom work.

Fourth, I articulate prayer as abiding communion with God. Through prayer, we enter the very presence of the triune God and are drawn deeper in relationship with God. As clergy live in an abiding communion with God through prayer, they experience the love of God that sustains their lives and brings joy.

Fifth, I write about prayer as a means of experiencing healing in our whole being. In prayer, clergy can honestly bring all their hurts, anxieties, disappointments, and sins before the Lord. Through prayer in abiding communion with God, we can experience healing in our whole being: heart, mind, body, and soul.

Sixth, I share the importance of prayer in the life and ministry of clergy. Prayer is the greatest spiritual practice of the pastor. The life and ministry of clergy must be a continual conversation with God through prayer. In prayer, we listen to the heartbeat of God so that the Lord will bring our hearts to beat in rhythm with His heart.

Seventh, I underscore the importance of prayer partners. It is vitally important for pastors to build a devoted team of prayer partners. The prayers of prayer partners will help pastors build community and protect their spirits from spiritual attacks.

Last, I provide a summary of how these insights into the theology of prayer provide a theological foundation for this Doctor of Ministry Project. The theology of prayer is a very wide field of study. The following insights reveal the importance of prayer and how living a devoted prayer life can help clergy experience joy.

Prayer: The Moravians and the Early Methodists

Prayer was an important spiritual practice in the lives of the Moravians and early Methodists. Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who became the spiritual leader of

the Moravians, was born in 1700 in Dresden, Germany.¹ Zinzendorf was raised by his grandmother, Henrietta von Gerstorff, who was a follower of the Spener-Francke Pietist movement in Saxony, Germany.²

Philip Jakob Spener, considered the father of Pietism,³ held to the Lutheran doctrine of the universal priesthood of all Christians. He called for a lesser focus on the differences between laity and clergy and a greater focus on the common ministry of all Christians. Spener formed small groups for the laity to develop a deeper life of devotion and study.⁴

Zinzendorf was greatly influenced by his grandmother's devotional life. By the age of six, he was writing love poems to Jesus Christ, and as a preadolescent, Zinzendorf was leading prayer meetings for family and friends. He began studying under August Hermann Francke at the age of ten. At the age of sixteen, while studying law at the University of Wittenberg, he formed a Pietist group called the "Order of the Grain of Mustard Seed."⁵

In 1727, Zinzendorf met the Moravians, a group of religious exiles who had left Moravia because of persecution.⁶ He offered refuge for the Moravians on his estate at

¹ Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), 482.

² Olson, 483.

³ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity*, Vol. 2, *The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2010), 259.

⁴ Gonzalez, 260.

⁵ Olson, 483.

⁶ Olson, 483.

Herrnhut.⁷ The Moravians established a congregation of Brethren at Herrnhut and Zinzendorf served as their spiritual leader.⁸

Disagreements emerged within the Moravian community at Herrnhut. Zinzendorf called the Moravians to seek harmony through a commitment to spiritual renewal and prayer. With a desire to experience spiritual renewal and growth, the Moravians began a prayer vigil that continued every day throughout the day and night. The prayer vigil continued unbroken for one hundred years. The Holy Spirit moved within the Moravians' hearts, bringing both personal and community-wide spiritual renewal and growth.⁹ Supernatural gifts were manifested, and miraculous healings occurred among the Moravians in the prayer meetings.¹⁰

As the prayer vigil continued, two of the Moravians were called to serve as missionaries.¹¹ In 1732, the Moravians sent their first two missionaries to the island of St. Thomas in the West Indies. By the time of Zinzendorf's death in 1760, about 230 male and female missionaries had been sent out from the congregation¹² to Africa, the Far East, and North and South America, among others.¹³

⁷ William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, eds., *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 653.

⁸ Henning Wrogemann, *Intercultural Theology*. Vol. 1, *Intercultural Hermeneutics*, trans. Karl E. Bohmer (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016), 254.

⁹ Sue Nilson Kibbey, *Flood Gates: Holy Momentum for a Fearless Church* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 2016), 31.

¹⁰ Frank H. Billman, *The Supernatural Thread in Methodism: Signs and Wonders Among Methodists Then and Now* (Monee, IL: Frank H. Billman, 2021), 48.

¹¹ Kibbey, 31.

¹² Wrogemann, 254.

¹³ Kibbey, 31.

Zinzendorf believed Jesus modeled the Christian mission by “his life of poverty and his redeeming work on the cross to lead people to God.”¹⁴ Zinzendorf’s and the Moravians’ worship and devotional lives centered on the suffering of Jesus Christ.¹⁵ They believed that the Christian missionary is to imitate Jesus by going to the people with the message of the gospel and improvising the method of ministry in the context. Zinzendorf wanted to focus the Christian mission on converting individual souls to faith rather than converting the masses. He wanted to form smaller communities of true believers within the larger institutional church.¹⁶

The Moravian missionaries often endured difficulties and made many sacrifices as they served among “unfamiliar living conditions, harsh climates, illnesses, and hostilities.”¹⁷ They held tightly to their spiritual practices as an anchor, a way of affirming their identity, and an expression of a sense of community. Prayer and intercession were important spiritual practices that kept them united while they were active in different places around the world.¹⁸

John Wesley met a group of Moravian missionaries on board a ship sailing from England to the colony of Georgia in 1735.¹⁹ Wesley was greatly influenced by the Moravians, especially Peter Boehler, who became Wesley’s spiritual advisor.²⁰ The

¹⁴ Wrogemann, 255.

¹⁵ Olson, 484.

¹⁶ Wrogemann, 255-56.

¹⁷ Wrogemann, 259.

¹⁸ Wrogemann, 259.

¹⁹ Gonzalez, 264.

²⁰ Gonzalez, 266.

lasting influence of the Moravians on Wesley and the Methodists Movement can be seen in the English Revival,²¹ renewed spirituality and church renewal through Christian communities within the established church,²² and Methodist missions.²³

Wesley formed Societies, Bands, and Class meetings influenced by the model of the Moravian bands and choirs.²⁴ When the Methodists were constant in prayer during Class meetings, some would be moved to shout with joy, while others cried for mercy.²⁵ Early American Methodists experienced the supernatural power of God in their times of prayer and worship. Lester Ruth writes, “The basic level of experience was an overwhelming sense of joy in knowing the graciousness of God, often after an agonizing time of acute awareness of God’s wrath.”²⁶ John Wesley and the early Methodists continued to be devoted to the spiritual practice of prayer, which helped keep the passion and joy of Jesus Christ alive within their hearts.

Prayer: Conversation in the Trinity

The eternal triune God – who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – invites us into the conversation of prayer.²⁷ Through prayer, the soul speaks with the God who makes

²¹ J. Wesley Bready, *England Before and After Wesley: The Evangelical Revival and Social Reform* (Vancouver, British Columbia: Regent College Publishing, 1939), 183.

²² Dyrness, 932.

²³ Bready, 375-76.

²⁴ Billman, 48-49.

²⁵ Billman, 101.

²⁶ Lester Ruth, *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 161.

²⁷ Dennis F. Kinlaw and Christine Albertson, *Prayer: Bearing the World as Jesus Did* (Anderson, IN: Warner Press, 2012), 1.

Himself known.²⁸ Wil Hernandez writes that prayer is a spiritual language that connects a person with “the one true God manifested in the person of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.”²⁹ In a Trinitarian understanding, we pray in the Spirit through the Christ to the Father. Prayer is first God’s prayer and second our prayer.³⁰ When we pray, we are praying to the Father through the mouth of Jesus Christ as He is praying to the Father.³¹

God initiates prayer. He is near to us, awakens our spirit with His love, and draws us to Himself.³² Richard Rohr writes that when you pray you are “making yourself a part of the dance, a part of the love, a part of the communion that is already happening” in the Trinity.³³ David Chotka writes, “When we pray, we participate in the mystery of the life of the Trinity.”³⁴

When we pray, we first listen, then we speak.³⁵ Von Balthasar writes, “Prayer is a conversation in which God’s word has the initiative and we, for the moment, can be nothing more than listeners. The essential thing is for us to hear God’s word and discover from it how to respond to him.”³⁶ Hernandez writes that prayer involves “active listening,

²⁸ Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Prayer*, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986), 14.

²⁹ Dyrness, 701.

³⁰ Richard Rohr and Mike Morrell, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 151-52.

³¹ Karl Barth, *Prayer*, ed. Don Saliers, trans. Sara F. Terrien (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 14.

³² Gerhard Tersteegen, *The Quiet Way: A Christian Path to Inner Peace*, trans. Emily Chisholm (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), 23.

³³ Rohr, 153.

³⁴ David Chotka and Maxie Dunnam, *Healing Prayer is God’s Idea: Embracing God’s Invitation to Intercede* (Coppell, TX: David Chotka and Maxie Dunnam, 2021), 20.

³⁵ Rohr, 153.

³⁶ Von Balthasar, 15.

patient waiting, and careful discernment with God through his Word, the Bible, as illumined by his Holy Spirit.”³⁷

God answers prayer as we make our requests known to Him. Our requests are weak and poor, but what is important is that God listens to our prayers.³⁸ God does not hear our prayers because they deserve honor. God hears our prayers because He is good.³⁹ Sue Nilson Kibbey writes, “The moment God’s people pray, God begins a response.”⁴⁰ The better we learn to pray, the more we realize our prayers are an answer to what God has already spoken to us.⁴¹ For God, prayer is a bond of love, and when we continually converse with God in prayer, we benefit from the dialogue.⁴²

Prayer: Joining God in His Kingdom Work

Prayer is cooperation with God.⁴³ Through prayer, we become true partners with God in His kingdom work.⁴⁴ God does not call us to work for Him; He calls us to work with Him in the conversation of prayer.⁴⁵ Rohr writes that our prayers become “much

³⁷ Dyrness, 701.

³⁸ Barth, 13.

³⁹ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1961), 83.

⁴⁰ Sue Nilson Kibbey, *Open Road* (Knoxville, TN: Market Square Publishing, 2021), 51.

⁴¹ Von Balthasar, 14.

⁴² John Chrysostom, *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 1, trans. Robert Charles Hill (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), 47.

⁴³ E. Stanley Jones, *How to Pray* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1943), 8.

⁴⁴ Duewel, *Touch the World Through Prayer*, 11.

⁴⁵ Kinlaw, *Prayer*, 13.

more a merging than a manipulating, much more dancing than dominating, much more participation than partisanship.”⁴⁶

E. Stanley Jones writes, “Prayer is not bending God to my will, but it is a bringing of my will into conformity with God’s will, so that his will may work in and through me.”⁴⁷ In prayer we wait upon God, seeking close fellowship with Him by an entire surrender to His will.⁴⁸ We surrender our life into God’s hands and then assert our will within God’s will,⁴⁹ giving Him our dearest and best.⁵⁰

Prayer is a lifestyle, not an occasional practice.⁵¹ Oswald Chambers writes, “Prayer is our business, our only business. Prayer is our holy occupation.”⁵² Praying is not simply a spiritual discipline we practice. It is living in the imitation of Jesus Christ and His love.⁵³ God desires all of us to be strong in prayer because prayer is so important to the Christian life and the work of God’s kingdom.⁵⁴ Through prevailing prayer, the

⁴⁶ Rohr, 154.

⁴⁷ Jones, 6.

⁴⁸ Andrew Murray, *Waiting on God* (Fort Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1978), 34.

⁴⁹ Jones, 7.

⁵⁰ Tersteegen, 20.

⁵¹ Jones, 6.

⁵² Chambers, *Prayer*, 8.

⁵³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *African Women’s Theologies, Spirituality, and Healing: Theological Perspectives from the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians*, 2018 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 2019), 20. <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/lib/dtl/reader.action?docID=6039416&ppg=58>.

⁵⁴ Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 11.

early church flourished and triumphed. Prayer remains the appointed means for the church today to call down the blessings and power of God upon ourselves and others.⁵⁵

Through prayer, we enter God's narrative and participate in God's work of salvation for the sake of the world.⁵⁶ It is through prayer that we can call upon the power of the Holy Spirit to make mission and world evangelism effective.⁵⁷ Prayer multiplies our efforts to join God in the harvest for His kingdom.⁵⁸ Prayer gives us the ability to cooperate with God in the work of His kingdom at any time, in any place, and for any situation.⁵⁹ Kibbey writes, "Through prayer we bring ourselves or our situation to the supernatural threshold of God's love and grace, asking God to do what only God's wisdom and power is capable of doing."⁶⁰ God takes our prayers and uses them to transform the world to become more like His kingdom.⁶¹

In the Gospels, Jesus never mentions prayers being unanswered. Jesus believed with absolute certainty that prayer is always answered.⁶² Rohr writes, "When you pray, God has already answered."⁶³ Kibbey continues this, writing, "Prayers asking for God's breakthroughs activate God's power and passion within each of us. Those who pray

⁵⁵ Andrew Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession: A Plea for More Prayer* (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2016), 15.

⁵⁶ Maxie Dunnam and John David Walt, Jr., *Praying the Story: Pastoral Prayers from the Psalms* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 6.

⁵⁷ Duewel, *Touch the World Through Prayer*, 15.

⁵⁸ Duewel, *Touch the World Through Prayer*, 18.

⁵⁹ Duewel, *Touch the World Through Prayer*, 22.

⁶⁰ Sue Nilson Kibbey, *Ultimate Reliance: Breakthrough Prayer Practices for Leaders* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 55.

⁶¹ Chotka, 25.

⁶² Chambers, *Prayer*, 12.

⁶³ Rohr, 154.

regularly for God's new possibilities and open doors find themselves habitually looking up and out with holy expectation.”⁶⁴

Prayer: Abiding Communion with God

The greatest end of prayer is living in communion with God,⁶⁵ being with Him, and enjoying His presence.⁶⁶ Terry Teykl writes, “Prayer has everything to do with the Presence of God, and the Presence of God unfolds in answer to prayer.”⁶⁷ Centering prayer draws us closer to and deepens our relationship with God.⁶⁸ Rich Villodas writes, “At the core of silent prayer is the commitment to establish relationship with God based on friendship rather than demands.”⁶⁹ Further, Margaret Therkelsen writes that in the mutual communion of prayer, you allow “God to draw nigh to you even as you draw nigh to him – so that a love exchange may take place.”⁷⁰ The deeper a person grows in spirit, the more prayer and communion with God become the exercise of love entirely.⁷¹

⁶⁴ Kibbey, *Open Road*, 33.

⁶⁵ Thomas Merton, *Spiritual Direction and Meditation* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1960), 71.

⁶⁶ Dyrness, 702.

⁶⁷ Terry Teykl, *The Presence Based Church*, (Muncie, IN: Prayer Point Press, 2003), 8.

⁶⁸ Brian D. Russell, *Centering Prayer: Sitting Quietly in God's Presence Can Change Your Life* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2021), 15.

⁶⁹ Rich Villodas, *The Deeply Formed Life: Five Transformative Values to Root Us in the Way of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2020), 23.

⁷⁰ Margaret Therkelsen, *The Love Exchange: An Adventure in Prayer* (Lexington, KY: Bristol House, 1992), 10.

⁷¹ John of the Cross, *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies Publications, 2017), 586.

Jesus wants us to know the life of abiding in Him. Prayer is the ongoing state of abiding relationship with Jesus.⁷² When we pray, we open ourselves to Jesus to allow Him to fill us and come nearer than we are to ourselves.⁷³ The power of prayer comes when we abide in Jesus like the branches that are growing in the vine from which they receive life.⁷⁴ Prayer is a breathing of the spirit that is necessary for life.⁷⁵ If we do not pray, we are like a person who does not breathe and will die.⁷⁶

Prayer: Healing for Our Whole Being

Prayer is important to the ministry of healing. Through prayer, we invite God into our circumstances. God knows us and our circumstances better than we do, and God has the power to bring change. Through prayer, we call upon God, who is love, to heal us and make us whole. We give to God our pain, heartaches, fears, and worries, asking Him to heal us in every aspect of our being.⁷⁷ In prayer, we allow the ever-present and all-loving God to see us as we are, and we stay with Him in prayer for some time that He may heal

⁷² Kinlaw, *Prayer*, 20.

⁷³ Tersteegen, 20.

⁷⁴ Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession*, 34.

⁷⁵ Barth, 15.

⁷⁶ Frederick Dale Bruner and William Hordern, *The Holy Spirit: Shy Member of the Trinity* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1984), 55.

⁷⁷ Mark Pearson, *Christian Healing: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2004), 94-96.

us.⁷⁸ As we abide with God in prayer, He helps us to see ourselves as He sees us and to see God for who He is.⁷⁹

Contemplative prayer is looking deep into your soul and looking beyond yourself to God. The more you practice contemplative prayer, the more you discover God and discover yourself in God.⁸⁰ Prayer changes the way we view things and changes the disposition of our hearts.⁸¹ Brian D. Russell writes, “God can use our time in silent prayer to cultivate in us higher levels of love for God, neighbor, and self.”⁸² The more a person grows in prayer, the more the prayers focus on adoration and thanksgiving, rather than self-centered prayers of petition.⁸³

God invites us to come into His presence where we may experience serenity, peace, joy, love, fellowship, openness, closeness, acceptance, and affirmation.⁸⁴ The door to God’s presence is Jesus Christ, and the key is prayer.⁸⁵ When we spend much time in prayer, our soul will find joy in Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ Therkelsen writes, “It is in prayer that God’s love is released, and we learn to live with his love. Only through the life of prayer

⁷⁸ Tersteegen, 22.

⁷⁹ Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 129, ProQuest Ebook Central.

⁸⁰ Von Balthasar, 24.

⁸¹ Oswald Chambers, *If You Will Ask* (Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery Publishing House, 1989), 16-7.

⁸² Russell, 63.

⁸³ Chan, 133.

⁸⁴ Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 1.

⁸⁵ Foster, 2.

⁸⁶ John of the Cross, 362.

can God's love gain more control over us and our love life. We must daily come and drink at the fountain of divine love.”⁸⁷

Further, Kibbey writes, “Prayer is the spiritual food that nourishes the life of Christ now alive in me.”⁸⁸ The daily and moment-by-moment supernatural nourishment through prayer was more important to Jesus than the daily nourishment of His body.⁸⁹ Chotka writes, “Prayer for healing is an extension of the ongoing ministry of the Risen Lord.”⁹⁰

The early disciples believed healing was an ordinary answer to prayer.⁹¹ In prayer, we come to God as we are so that He may transform us as He desires us to be.⁹² If we have faith in God, believe that He loves and cares for us, and believe that He makes Himself responsible for the results of our prayer, we should pray trusting God to bring the results He desires.⁹³ The deep conversation of prayer gives never-ending joy and amazement to those who pray.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ Therkelsen, 42.

⁸⁸ Kibbey, *Flood Gates*, 30.

⁸⁹ Kibbey, *Open Road*, 12.

⁹⁰ Chotka, 20.

⁹¹ Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1999), 45.

⁹² Tersteegen, 21.

⁹³ MacNutt, 96.

⁹⁴ Von Balthasar, 23.

Prayer: Clergy Life and Ministry

The clergyperson must be devoted to prayer,⁹⁵ as prayer is clergy's greatest work and weapon.⁹⁶ Pastors must make their study a prayer closet⁹⁷ and lead the people from their knees in prayer facing the cross.⁹⁸ Prayer makes the person, the preacher, and the pastor.⁹⁹

Clergypersons who do not make prayer an essential practice in their life and ministry are weak as a co-laborer in God's work and are powerless to advance God's work in the world.¹⁰⁰ Duewel writes, "Your prayer life is a clear revelation of how much a person of God and how much a spiritual leader you are. You will never be more important in God's sight than your prayer life. No part of your ministry will be more greatly rewarded in eternity. The eternal value of all else you do depends on this."¹⁰¹

Prevailing prayer involves the investment of time.¹⁰² Great people of God in the Bible and church history spent much time in daily prayer and, occasionally, long seasons of prayer.¹⁰³ The devotional life of the early Methodist circuit riders mainly consisted of reading the Bible and theological books and praying. Francis Asbury would pray up to

⁹⁵ Wesley L. Duewel, *Ablaze for God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989), 212.

⁹⁶ E. M. Bounds, *Power Through Prayer* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1979), 14.

⁹⁷ Bounds, 41.

⁹⁸ Teykl, 215.

⁹⁹ Bounds, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Bounds, 15.

¹⁰¹ Duewel, *Ablaze for God*, 213.

¹⁰² Duewel, *Mighty Prevailing Prayer*, 158.

¹⁰³ Bounds, 54.

twelve times daily and sometimes through the night. With their devoted lifestyle of prayer, the circuit riders would seek to experience the power and presence of God and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Through prayer, they desired to receive comfort from all their trials and joy for life and ministry.¹⁰⁴

Pastors cannot keep their spirit in unity with the holy nature of God's calling without a devoted prayer life. E. M. Bounds writes, "Prayer freshens the heart of the preacher, keeps it in tune with God and in sympathy with the people, lifts his ministry out of the chilly air of a profession, fructifies routine and moves every wheel with the facility and power of a divine unction."¹⁰⁵

Prayer brings the pastor's heart in union with God's vision of and interest in people,¹⁰⁶ even with some people they have never known before.¹⁰⁷ The pastor's prayer ministry for the people is what brings the heart of the pastor into sympathy with the people.¹⁰⁸ Prayer walks in their community are a means to have a conversation with God to give a clearer vision of the needs of neighbors and where God is working in the community.¹⁰⁹ God will anoint pastors' hearts with tears as they pray for the people.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁴ Rimi Xhemajli, *The Supernatural and the Circuit Riders: The Rise of Early American Methodism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2021), 110-11.

¹⁰⁵ Bounds, 34.

¹⁰⁶ Chambers, *Prayer*, 97.

¹⁰⁷ John of the Cross, 271.

¹⁰⁸ Bounds, 49.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Adam Beck and Jorge Acevedo, *A Field Guide to Methodist Fresh Expressions* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2020), 129.

¹¹⁰ Duewel, *Ablaze for God*, 237.

Intercessory prayer is what Jesus Christ ever lives to do on His throne at the right hand of the Father.¹¹¹ The pastor has no greater responsibility than the prayer ministry for the people. Pastors' prayers for their sermons, worship, and outreach ministries are important. However, they must pray for the people name by name and family by family.¹¹²

Prayer: The Importance of Prayer Partners

Pastors' prayer ministry for others is of utmost importance, but it is also vitally important for the pastor to have prayer partners who are praying with and for them.¹¹³ Prayer unites pastors with other people because they are all facing challenging experiences and need the help that God alone can provide.¹¹⁴ Jorge Acevedo writes, "We all have a soul-deep need to be the object of prayer. It is both affirming and humbling to be on the receiving end of others' prayers. When we allow others to pray for us, we experience the supernatural love of God expressed through our fellow human beings."¹¹⁵ Prayer provides protection for the pastor and other church workers from spiritual attack.¹¹⁶ The prayers of the individual are gathered with the prayers of others into the

¹¹¹ Murray, *The Ministry of Intercession*, 18.

¹¹² Duewel, *Ablaze for God*, 228.

¹¹³ Bounds, 81.

¹¹⁴ Barth, 11-12.

¹¹⁵ Jorge Acevedo, *Holy Living: Neighboring* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019), 101.

¹¹⁶ Michael Moynagh, *Church for Every Context: An Introduction to Theology and Practice* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2012), 269.

prayers of the church. The prayers of the church are gathered into the prayers of Jesus Christ in the presence of the Father.¹¹⁷

Prayer is a spiritual discipline that helps form community.¹¹⁸ Having a wide circle of prayer partners will strengthen the spiritual heart of ministry, open avenues for guidance of the Holy Spirit, help those in mission ministry stay rooted to the living Christian faith, and provide additional practical support for ministry.¹¹⁹ It is important to have prayer partners to establish networks that can model prayer to non-believers, bring people to faith, and help people mature in faith.¹²⁰

Conclusion

The study of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement provides insight into how Zinzendorf and the Moravians influenced John Wesley and the early Methodists, especially regarding their theology of prayer. The prayer life of the Moravians and the early Methodists provided power and joy for life and ministry even when they faced challenging circumstances. The prayer life of the Moravians made a lasting impact on John Wesley's life and ministry.

First, the theology of prayer as a conversation with the triune God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – provides insight into the importance for clergy to live in the conversation of prayer with the Trinity. Prayer is not only our speaking to God. More importantly, prayer is our listening to God. It is important for clergy to listen to the

¹¹⁷ Von Balthasar, 100.

¹¹⁸ Moynagh, 346.

¹¹⁹ Moynagh, 269-70.

¹²⁰ Moynagh, 269.

heartbeat of God in prayer so that they may know what is important to God's heart and learn how to enter the conversation of prayer with their prayers.

Next, the theology of prayer as joining God in His kingdom work provides insight into how clergy can invest their time and energy in what God is doing rather than working towards their own plans and strength. When clergy work towards their own plans, they can easily become stressed, weary, and frustrated, which will lead them to burn out. However, when clergy join God in what He is doing, He will provide the vision and power to work with Him, rather than on their own.

Further, the theology of prayer as abiding communion in God provides insight in how clergy can keep their heart and life in Jesus Christ. As clergy abide in communion with God in prayer, they will experience the love of God, which will sustain their life. The abiding communion in God will bring them joy as they join God in His kingdom work.

In addition, the theology of prayer as healing for our whole being, provides insight in how clergy can honestly bring all their hurts, anxieties, disappointments, frustrations, and sins to the Lord in prayer. Clergy need to experience healing and wholeness in their personal lives. Through the conversation of prayer with the Lord, clergy can experience healing in every aspect of their brokenness so that they may experience the love, peace, and joy of wholeness and holiness in Jesus.

The theology of prayer for clergy life and ministry also provides insight by helping clergy understand the centrality of prayer for life and ministry. When clergy practice a devoted life of prayer, their relationship with Jesus will remain healthy, the ministry will be fruitful, and they will experience the joy of Jesus. Last, the theology of

prayer will help clergy understand that prayer partners provide community and help clergy guard their hearts against temptations and spiritual attack. A healthy network of prayer partners can nurture joy within the heart of the pastor by reminding them that they are not alone in life and ministry.

In the next chapter, we will explore the interdisciplinary field of neuroscience. The study of the human brain is a fascinating field that reveals important insights into how the brain can heal and grow. We will also explore how contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation can have a positive effect on the human brain.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In this chapter, I first present the insights I gained in my research on the field of neuroscience. Studies in neuroscience have revealed how the human brain responds to the negative and positive experiences of life that affect the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person. Second, I present the insights I gained in my research on the field of neurotheology. Studies in neurotheology have revealed that a person's belief in God and spiritual practices affect the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person. Third, I present the insights I gained in my research on the field of neuroplasticity. Studies in neuroplasticity have revealed how the brain heals, grows, and transforms in relationship to negative and positive experiences.

Fourth, I present the insights I gained about how contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation help heal and transform the human brain. Studies have revealed how contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation can have a positive effect on the neuroplasticity of the brain. Through the long-term daily practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines or mindful meditation, the human brain can heal, grow, and transform in such a manner that will help the person experience better mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

Last, I present my summary of how these insights of neuroscience, neurotheology, and neuroplasticity provide an interdisciplinary foundation for this Doctor of Ministry Project. The field of neuroscience provides a wealth of information and data that highlights the wonder of how God has created the human brain to be able to heal, grow, and transform. Contemplative spiritual practices and mindful meditation play an important role in the health of the human brain and can be instrumental in helping clergy experience joy in life and ministry.

Neuroscience

Neuroscience includes the fields of cognitive neuroscience, neurology, psychiatry, psychology, and social behavior.¹ We interact with the world through our bodies and brains.² Research studies have shown that the mind can have both a negative and positive effect on the body,³ greatly affecting a person's healing and long-term health. Madeline Maier-Lorentz writes, "The mind is responsible for what one thinks or believes, and it can have either a positive or negative effect on one's health."⁴

Studies in the field of neuroscience have discovered unique ways in which the human mind and brain interacts with God. Kirk A. Bingaman writes, "The extraordinary advances in recent years in the field of neuroscience make it abundantly clear that God is

¹ Andrew Newberg, "Methodological Principles for Research in Neurotheology: Practical and Philosophical Implications," *NeuroQuantology* 8, no. 4 (2010): 532, <https://doi.org/10.14704/nq.2010.8.4.368>.

² Andrzej K. Jastrzebski, "The Neuroscience of Spirituality," *Pastoral Psychology* 67, no. 5 (October 2018): 518, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-018-0840-2>.

³ Madeline Maier-Lorentz, "The Importance of Prayer for Mind/Body Healing," *Nursing Forum* 39, no. 3 (July 2004): 24, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/importance-prayer-mind-body-healing/docview/195002966/se-2?accountid=202487>.

⁴ Maier-Lorentz, 25.

in the details of human experience and, more specifically, in the profound details of mind, brain, and human consciousness.”⁵

Neurotheology

The discoveries of how the human mind and brain interact with God has led to the development of neurotheology, which is the field of scholarship that links neuroscience and theology.⁶ The human brain is remarkably connected to a person’s spiritual and moral experiences. Neurotheology brings neuroscience and theology together to make a common framework that guides the understanding of religious experience and belief.⁷ In the field of neurotheology, theology is understood as the study of God, primarily in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, the understanding of theology has expanded in the academic world to include Buddhism, Hinduism, Shamanism, and other belief systems.⁸ Andrew Newberg writes, “The brain has universal functions and thus all religious beliefs and all religious systems can be considered from a neurotheological perspective.”⁹

Various studies reveal potential mechanisms of spiritual healing and well-being. People who have religious practices and spiritual beliefs often have a sense of hope and a

⁵ Kirk A. Bingaman, “The Art of Contemplative and Mindfulness Practice: Incorporating the Findings of Neuroscience into Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Pastoral Psychology* 60, no. 3 (June 2011): 478, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-011-0328-9>.

⁶ Newberg, 532.

⁷ Jonathan Kopel B.S., Carmine Gorga PhD., Paul Thomas M.D., Roger K. Strickland M.B.A., and Donald C. Wunsch II PhD, “Neurotheology in Interfaith Dialogue,” *Baylor University Medical Center. Proceedings* 33, no. 2 (April 2020): 296, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08998280.2019.1698881>.

⁸ Newberg, 532-33.

⁹ Newberg, 534.

positive perspective, live a healthy lifestyle, tend to avoid risky sexual behavior, have supportive social networks, and have increased expressions of positive emotions (e.g., forgiveness, love, joy, peace) and decreased negative emotions (e.g., fear, anxiety, depression).¹⁰

Many religious traditions see an important connection between our physical brains and our emotional and spiritual experiences with God.¹¹ Different studies have been conducted to assess the beliefs, reactions, thoughts, and disciplines that are connected to God and religion. The experience of an interaction with God or other significant experiences that are connected to enlightenment, emotions, and consciousness of the body and mind are connected to the whole brain.¹²

There is no single part of the brain that functions alone concerning thoughts of religion or God. Studies have discovered that in people who practice religious spirituality, their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors interact with each other to activate and deactivate different neuronal conditions throughout the brain to modify spiritual behavior.¹³ All parts of the brain work together, with each contributing in unique ways to human belief, responses, and thoughts of spirituality and God. Samarth Shukla writes: “Our brain is a center of excellence. It is a temple in itself for the realization of the existence of God as

¹⁰ Shri K. Mishra, Elizabeth Togneri, Byomesh Tripathi, and Bhavesh Trikamji, “Spirituality and Religiosity and its Role in Health and Diseases,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 56, no. 4 (August 2017): 1286-87, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-015-0100-z>.

¹¹ Kopel, 296.

¹² Samarth Shukla, Sourya Acharya, and Devendra Rajput, “Neurotheology-Matters of the Mind or Matters that Mind?” *Journal of clinical and diagnostic research*, no. 7 (2013): 1487, <https://doi.org/10.7860/JCDR/2013/5409.3181>.

¹³ Kopel, 297.

well as to preach and to follow the moralities and prohibitions in the form of the practice which is called religion.”¹⁴

Neuroplasticity

Research in the field of neuroscience has uncovered that the human brain is not fixed and unchanging, as was once thought. The human brain has the remarkable ability to change, grow, and transform its structure,¹⁵ known as neuroplasticity.¹⁶ The study of the neuroplasticity of the human brain reveals that neurons that activate together become connected. Bessel Van Der Kolk writes, “When a circuit fires repeatedly, it can become a default setting – the response most likely to occur. If you feel safe and loved, your brain becomes specialized in exploration, play and cooperation; if you are frightened and unwanted, it specializes in managing feelings of fear and abandonment.”¹⁷

Neuroscientific research has shown that the human brain tends to retain negative experiences more easily than positive experiences.¹⁸ The amygdala part of the brain warns us of danger and activates the stress response of the body. When the amygdala reacts with alarm, it triggers stress hormones and nerve impulses that cause an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, and breathing as the body prepares for fight or flight.¹⁹ Trying to suppress or avoid our painful experiences and unpleasant thoughts causes internal

¹⁴ Shukla, 1487.

¹⁵ Bingaman, “The Art,” 478.

¹⁶ Kirk A. Bingaman, “Beyond Original Sin: A Paradigm Shift for the Age of Neuroscience,” *Pastoral Psychology* 61, no. 4 (August 2012): 413, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-012-0432-5>.

¹⁷ Bessel A. Van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 56.

¹⁸ Bingaman, “Beyond,” 413.

¹⁹ Van der Kolk, 42.

distress to increase. Wrestling with our worrisome thoughts and feelings and exerting energy to avoid or resist them increases brain activity,²⁰ reinforcing the very thoughts and feelings we are trying to disregard.²¹

Stanford psychologist Laura Carstensen studied the brain activity of young and elderly people when they were presented with negative images and positive images. She discovered that young peoples ‘amygdalae activated in response to both the negative and positive images. The amygdala of the elderly people only activated in response to the positive images. She concluded that the elderly had learned to focus on the positive things in life, which rewired their brains to not react to negative experiences and to enjoy positive experiences. By training their brains in this manner, the elderly people were happier because they focused their attention on the positive.²²

Contemplative Spiritual Disciplines and Mindful Meditation

Neuroscience and psychotherapeutic studies are revealing that contemplative meditation aids in preventative and restorative mental health.²³ Neuroscience has revealed that the daily spiritual practice of contemplative prayer and/or mindful

²⁰ Kirk A. Bingaman, “When Acceptance is the Road to Growth and Healing: Incorporating the Third Wave of Cognitive Therapies into Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 5 (October 2015): 568, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-015-0641-9>.

²¹ Bingaman, “When Acceptance,” 569.

²² Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 78.

²³ Denis Larrivee and Luis Echarte, “Contemplative Meditation and Neuroscience: Prospects for Mental Health,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 3 (June 2018): 974, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0475-0>.

meditation also affects the plasticity of the human brain.²⁴ Studies have shown that long-term daily contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation have a calming effect on the amygdala.²⁵ Consistent contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation have the ability “to quiet limbic structures and circuitry associated with fear and stress while strengthening frontal cortical regions of the brain connected with high-order processing.”²⁶

Historically, the concept of mindfulness comes from Buddhism and other contemplative traditions.²⁷ Mindfulness is typically defined as the condition of being aware of what is occurring in the present moment.²⁸ Another way of understanding mindfulness is as a set of meditative practices for the development of attention to the present.²⁹

Mindfulness is the ability to evaluate our thoughts, feelings, and emotions calmly and objectively and then take time to allow the executive brain to inhibit, organize, and

²⁴ Kirk A. Bingaman, “The Promise of Neuroplasticity for Pastoral Care and Counseling,” *Pastoral Psychology* 62, no. 5 (October 2013): 559, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-013-0513-0>.

²⁵ Bingaman, “The Art,” 481.

²⁶ Kirk A. Bingaman, “Incorporating Contemplative Neuroscience and Mindfulness-Based Therapies into Pastoral Care and Counseling: A Critical Correlational Method,” *Pastoral Psychology* 65, no. 6 (December 2016): 767, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-016-0719-z>.

²⁷ Kirk Warren Brown and Richard M. Ryan, “The Benefits of being Present: Mindfulness and its Role in Psychological Well-being,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 84, no. 4 (April 2003): 822, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.84.4.822>.

²⁸ Thomas Howard Morris, “Transformative Learning through Mindfulness: Exploring the Mechanism of Change,” *Australian Journal of Adult Learning* 60, no. 1 (April 2020): 51, <http://dtl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.dtl.idm.oclc.org/scholarly-journals/transformative-learning-through-mindfulness/docview/2527610810/se-2?accountid=202487>.

²⁹ Rogério C. Calia, Marcelo De Oliveira S.B., and Marcelo M. P. Demarzo, “Mindfulness and Theory U for the Professional Sense of Purpose,” *Revista De Administração Mackenzie* 19, no. 5 (September 2018): 3, <https://doi.org/10.1590/1678-6971/eRAMG180021>.

temper the automatic reactions of the emotional brain.³⁰ Van der Kolk writes, “Mindfulness has been shown to have a positive effect on numerous psychiatric, psychosomatic, and stress-related symptoms, including depression and chronic pain.”³¹

Mindful meditation is the practice of learning to focus on an anchor of attention. When the mind becomes distracted, mindful meditation can help the person focus on the anchor to return to a healthier state of mind.³² A person lacking mindfulness has the characteristics of becoming worried and fixated in the past or the future, which takes a person away from being fully mindful of the present moment.³³

Research shows that the practice of mindfulness improves health and well-being and reduces stress.³⁴ In a study of professionals, mindfulness was shown to develop their cognitive, emotional, and physiological abilities, which improved performance, interpersonal relationships, and well-being at work.³⁵ Calia states: “Mindfulness also allows a decentralization of thoughts and automatic emotions and permits a broader view of the context, favoring emergence of new insights to the situation.”³⁶

When we become mindful and are willing to accept the reality of the present moment in which we have anxious thoughts and painful experiences, the process of

³⁰ Van der Kolk, 62.

³¹ Van der Kolk, 211.

³² Calia, 4.

³³ Morris, 53.

³⁴ Claude-hélène Mayer, Rian Viviers, Aden-paul Flotman, and Detlef Schneider-stengel, “Enhancing Sense of Coherence and Mindfulness in an Ecclesiastical, Intercultural Group Training Context,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 55, no. 6 (December 2016): 2026, <https://doi:10.1007/s10943-016-0301-0>.

³⁵ Calia, 5.

³⁶ Calia, 6.

mindfulness and acceptance can facilitate change in our thoughts, feelings, and perceptions.³⁷ As such, mindfulness can become an important resource for clergy. Overtime, ministry can become “aloof, boring and tedious.”³⁸ Mindfulness can facilitate changes in these neural processes, helping clergy rediscover their vocational purpose and meaning.³⁹

In one study, mindfulness and acceptance were combined in the Monitor and Acceptance Theory.⁴⁰ Mindfulness is a practice of monitoring present experiences as they occur. Acceptance is the practice of not denying or avoiding unpleasant experiences while also not becoming fixated on experiences.⁴¹

The practice of mindfulness and acceptance can increase positive experiences and happiness in everyday life.⁴² Bingaman writes, “Mindfulness- and acceptance-based frames of reference with regular contemplative-meditational practice has the capacity to help clients and congregants reshape their mind and brain, leading to lasting changes in both neural functioning and structure.”⁴³

³⁷ Bingaman, “When Acceptance,” 571.

³⁸ Mayer, 2032.

³⁹ Mayer, 2032.

⁴⁰ Emily K. Lindsay, Brian Chin, Carol M. Greco, Shinzen Young, Kirk W. Brown, Aidan G. C. Wright, Joshua M. Smyth, Deanna Burkett, and J. D. Creswell, “How Mindfulness Training Promotes Positive Emotions: Dismantling Acceptance Skills Training in Two Randomized Controlled Trials,” *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 115, no. 6 (December 2018): 945, <https://doi:10.1037/pspa0000134>.

⁴¹ Lindsay, 946.

⁴² Lindsay, 965.

⁴³ Bingaman, “When Acceptance,” 578.

Mindfulness and spiritual meditation that focuses upon God is more effective than secular meditation regarding health benefits.⁴⁴ Mindful meditation and contemplative spiritual disciplines, such as centering prayer, can help us re-center ourselves in the gift of the present moment so that we may engage with the fullness of life.⁴⁵ Through mindful meditation and contemplative spiritual disciplines, a person can create sacred space in which “they can experience more fully the peace and joy of God’s presence, as they learn to decenter from anxious thoughts about the future.”⁴⁶

The practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation can produce changes in a person’s neural circuitry and brain structure.⁴⁷ Bingaman writes, “Each time we engage in contemplative-meditational practices we are literally regrooving and re-writing the neural pathways in the brain. Moreover, we are calming the stress region of the brain by lowering the activity of the amygdala, which is imperative if we intend to be less anxious about tomorrow.”⁴⁸ Peter J. Bellini continues, writing, “Spiritual, mental, and physical renewal transpires through meditation on the Word of God that utilizes cognitive behavioral hermeneutics and strategies of restructuring to impact the rerouting of neural pathways for healing and even the emerging of new neurons with new assignments for reinvention and renovation.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Mishra, 1287.

⁴⁵ Bingaman, “When Acceptance,” 573.

⁴⁶ Bingaman, “When Acceptance,” 577.

⁴⁷ Bingaman, “The Art,” 479.

⁴⁸ Bingaman, “The Promise,” 559.

⁴⁹ Peter J. Bellini, *The Cerulean Soul: A Relational Theology of Depression* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021), 262.

Further, Bingaman writes, “Repeating a spiritually powerful phrase in the context of centering prayer has the capacity to resculpt the brain over time.”⁵⁰ With the ability of the human brain to re-sculpt itself functionally and structurally, daily contemplative spiritual disciplines can help a person focus upon the positive experiences that will develop joy within the person.⁵¹ Over time, the daily practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation can help a person realize their value as a person of God.⁵²

Studies have shown that meditative prayer has beneficial effects on physical health, including lowering breathing rate, heart rate, and blood pressure; and alleviating pain, nausea, vomiting, and insomnia.⁵³ Many other studies have revealed that personal spirituality developed through prayer has a positive effect on mental health.⁵⁴ Larrivee states: “Prayer creates a relaxation response, which has been very helpful in treating many diseases, especially cardiovascular problems, AIDS, chronic pain, and depression.”⁵⁵

The regular practice of prayer has been a source of comfort and hope for people throughout history. Prayer takes a person’s mind off worldly distractions and may

⁵⁰ Bingaman, “The Art,” 489.

⁵¹ Bingaman, “Beyond,” 414.

⁵² Bingaman, “Beyond,” 416.

⁵³ Maier-Lorentz, 25-26.

⁵⁴ Larrivee, 960.

⁵⁵ Maier-Lorentz, 28.

provide relief from stress by giving a person a peaceful, contemplative state. Prayer may lead a person to a better-informed assessment of stressful experiences and relationships.⁵⁶

For example, in a study of twenty people who practice centering prayer,⁵⁷ participants noted that it reduced and almost eliminated their anxiety and stress while increasing the experience of positive emotions. Further, the practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines, such as centering prayer, has great influence on the neuroplasticity of the human brain to lessen engrained negativity and anxiety. Centering prayer helps the brain to anticipate times of spiritual dryness and trials by developing an anchor to which the brain more readily returns to focus upon positive thoughts and emotions.⁵⁸ There is much neuroimaging data that reveals how regular contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation can teach a person to automatically relax in stressful situations.⁵⁹ An example is a study of a group of nuns who, while practicing Centering Prayer for at least fifteen years, were training their bodies to relax automatically. Thus, in more stressful circumstances the nuns would have the inner resources to keep grounded and centered.⁶⁰ Prayer can aid a person in coping with life changes by providing a safe place, strength, comfort, and guidance.⁶¹

⁵⁶ G. Rainville, “The Interrelation of Prayer and Worship Service Attendance in Moderating the Negative Impact of Life Event Stressors on Mental Well-being,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 6 (December 2018): 2156, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-017-0494-x>.

⁵⁷ Jesse Fox, Daniel Gutierrez, Jessica Haas, Dinesh Braganza, and Christine Berger, “A Phenomenological Investigation of Centering Prayer using Conventional Content Analysis,” *Pastoral Psychology* 64, no. 6 (December 2015): 808, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-015-0657-1>.

⁵⁸ Fox, 821-22.

⁵⁹ Bingaman, “The Art,” 488.

⁶⁰ Bingaman, “The Art,” 487-88.

⁶¹ Maier-Lorentz, 29.

The regular practice of centering prayer can also have a positive effect by helping people develop closer relationships with and express more compassion to others.⁶² When a person knows they are being prayed for by another person, positive emotions such as relaxation, peace, hope, and love may be experienced that can aid the body to promote healing.⁶³

For a person's mind and brain to change from an anxious and fearful condition to a more happy, peaceful, and loving state, it takes an ongoing regular practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation.⁶⁴ The practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation must be an ongoing daily practice "to turn the cacophonous neural highway into a more peaceful and tranquil footpath."⁶⁵ Each time a person practices contemplative prayer and/or mindful meditation to enhance positive thoughts and feelings from anxious memories and negative states of mind, small amounts of neural structure are built.⁶⁶ When a person practices regular contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation in the abiding presence of Jesus Christ, they become a different person.⁶⁷

Neuroscience and neurotheology will inform my Doctor of Ministry Project by providing an understanding of how the human brain reacts to stress and how the practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines and/or mindful meditation can help clergy become

⁶² Fox, 821.

⁶³ Maier-Lorentz, 28.

⁶⁴ Bingaman, "The Art," 483.

⁶⁵ Bingaman, "The Promise," 559.

⁶⁶ Bingaman, "The Promise," 559.

⁶⁷ Bingaman, "The Art," 479.

more aware of the effect of negative and positive experiences upon their mind and body and focus upon the presence of Jesus Christ through a devoted prayer life to experience joy.

Conclusion

The study of neuroscience informs this Doctor of Ministry Project by providing insight into how the human brain responds to the negative and positive experiences of life. The human brain takes in many negative and positive experiences every day. This, in turn, affects the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person.

In addition, the study of neurotheology informs my Doctor of Ministry Project by providing insight into how religious practices and spiritual beliefs influence the human brain. Studies in neurotheology have revealed that a person's belief in God and spiritual practices affect the mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person. Further, the study of neuroplasticity informs my Doctor of Ministry Project by providing insight into how the brain heals, grows, and transforms in relation to negative and positive experiences.

The study of contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation in relationship with neuroscience, neurotheology, and neuroplasticity informs my Doctor of Ministry Project by providing insight into how contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation can have a positive effect on the neuroplasticity of the brain. Through the long-term daily practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines or mindful meditation, the human brain can heal, grow, and transform in such a manner that will help the person experience better mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

The previous chapters provide the foundation for this project. In the next chapter, I will explain the design and implementation of the project and share its results. Finally, I will offer a summary of learning.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations which support this project aimed at equipping clergy to practice a devoted prayer life. The foundation chapters reveal the project's significance and build the basic outline for the project implementation. Each of the foundation chapters integrates to support this project.

Ministry has many challenges that can lead clergy to experience burnout. Clergy who experience burnout reportedly lack joy. A devoted prayer life can be an effective means for clergy to draw deeper into the presence of Jesus Christ. My hypothesis is that if clergy practice a devoted prayer life, then clergy will experience joy.

The project was conducted as a workshop in six modules over six weeks, during which each foundation chapter provided resources for learning among the participants. The general nature and content of the project were to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes resulting in the experience of joy among the clergy of the ERD by having participants practice centering prayer. The research methods of the project were a voluntary and anonymous survey, a pre-project questionnaire, a post-project questionnaire, focused journaling assignments, and focused individual interviews.

This project was formed by the synergy of my story and the story of my context in the ERD. From my first expression of faith in Jesus Christ, I have believed that joy is a fruit of living in a relationship with Jesus. Through the years of my faith journey and ministry, I have experienced the joy of Jesus. The joy I have experienced through my relationship with Jesus has been a positive influence on my interests and skills in studying, preaching, and teaching the Word of God, my ministry of prayer, ministry of witness and evangelism, and ministry of discipleship. However, over the years of my ministry, I began to realize that I was not experiencing joy in my life and ministry to the degree I had in previous years. The work of ministry had become laborious, and I was experiencing the effects of burnout.

The contextual analysis of the ERD helped me identify some contributing factors to clergy burnout. The clergy of the ERD are experiencing challenges in ministry due to some clergy serving more than one congregation, a declining and aging population, and having to discover new ways of leading ministry. Other contributing factors to clergy burnout include churches that are inwardly focused on the preferences of the church members, neglecting to have an outward focus into the community, and neglecting to notice and consider changes occurring in the culture of the community.

An exegesis of John 15:1-17 formed the biblical foundation for this project. It is in the abiding relationship with Jesus that a disciple experiences Jesus' joy in life and ministry. Clergy who practice a devoted prayer life will abide more deeply in Jesus. As clergy abide more deeply in Jesus, they will experience the joy of Jesus, which will make their joy complete.

John Wesley provided the historical foundation for this project. Wesley experienced challenges and times of discouragement in ministry and longed to experience joy in his spirit. He grew in his spirit and experienced joy as he breathed in the Spirit of Christ more deeply through his devoted life of prayer. Wesley instructed the Methodist preachers to practice a devoted prayer life.

The theological foundation for this project drew upon ancient and contemporary theological contributions that relate to the theology of prayer with a specific focus on Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement. Zinzendorf and the Moravians devoted themselves to prayer and through this devoted prayer life experienced power and joy for life and ministry even though they faced challenging circumstances. By exploring other theological contributions, this project gained insight into understanding prayer as a conversation and an abiding communion with God through which we join God in His kingdom work. Prayer is also a means of experiencing healing for our whole being. Theological contributions also provided insight into the importance of the centrality of prayer and the need for prayer partners for clergy.

The interdisciplinary foundation for this project was informed by the studies of neuroscience, neuroplasticity, neurotheology, contemplative spiritual disciplines, and mindful meditation. The study of neuroscience provided insight into how the human brain responds to negative and positive experiences and how the response of the brain affects the person's mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Neuroplasticity informed the project by providing insight into how the brain heals, grows, and transforms in response to negative and positive experiences. Neurotheology informed the project by providing insight into how religious practices and spiritual beliefs influence the human

brain. The study of contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation informed the project by providing insight into how contemplative spiritual practices and mindful meditation can positively affect the brain's neuroplasticity and overall mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health of the person. The following sections of this chapter will describe the methodology, implementation, and results of the project, and conclude with observations about the effectiveness of the project and some possible areas for future study.

Methodology

Project Overview

A qualitative approach was used to collect data for this project. A quantitative approach was not possible due to the relatively small number of possible respondents and the time limitations of the project. The data collection methods used in the project were a survey, a pre-project questionnaire, a post-project questionnaire, focused journaling assignments, and focused individual interviews.

The survey was voluntary and anonymous and can be found in Appendix A. It collected data from clergy of the ERD regarding the behavioral data of the practice of private prayer, the affective data of the experience of burnout in ministry, and the affective data of the experience of the presence of Jesus and joy in relationship to the practice of private prayer. The survey helped illuminate correlations between the practice of private prayer, the experience of burnout, and the experience of joy in the respondents.

The pre and post questionnaires helped measure cognitive changes regarding key project themes such as: abiding in Jesus, centering prayer, and joy. The questionnaires

also helped measure behavioral changes in the participants' practice of private prayer, and affective changes in the participants regarding ministry and the practice of private prayer. The pre and post-project questionnaires contained identical questions and can be found in Appendix B.

The focused journaling assignments, which can be found in Appendix C, asked the project participants to practice centering prayer for twenty minutes daily. The project participants were then asked to write about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arose from their practice of centering prayer. The focused journaling helped measure the participants' behavioral, affective, and cognitive changes because of their practice of centering prayer.

The focused individual interviews were conducted in person with the project participants at the end of the project. The interview questions can be found in Appendix D. The interview questions to which the project participants responded were helpful in providing more data regarding the cognitive, affective, and behavioral learnings and changes in the participants because of the project. The interview questions were also helpful in evaluating the effectiveness of the project modules and provided information for possible future implementation of the modules.

Participants

The participants were recruited through three different means. First, an invitation was posted on the Illinois Great Rivers Conference and the Embarras River District social media platforms. Second, the invitation was also sent directly to the ERD clergy email list provided by the ERD office. Last, the District Superintendent of the ERD also

suggested clergy whom he thought would benefit from participating in the project. I contacted those clergy suggested by the District Superintendent by email and telephone to recruit them to participate in the project. The project plan was for a range of six to twelve participants. There were many clergy who expressed interest in participating in the project. However, some were not able to participate because of schedule conflicts and the length of the six-week project.

There were six clergy who participated in the entirety of the project. Cognitive change in the participants was sought by teaching the material of each of the foundation chapters of the project in weekly modules over the course of the project. Further cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes were sought in the participants through their daily practice of centering prayer and journaling assignments during the six-week project. The data collection went well and provided insightful correlations that helped illuminate what influence the project had and how it may be improved for possible future implementation.

Implementation

This project consisted of a six-module workshop titled “Abiding in Christ Through Prayer.” The workshop schedule and expectations were communicated to the participants by email and telephone conversations. The communication with the participants made it clear that they were participating in a research project.

The six participants represented a range of ministry experiences. At the time of the project workshop, one participant was in the early stages of ministry with a few years of experience. Another participant had served in ministry for a decade. Another

participant had served in ministry for many years and was approaching retirement. The remaining three participants had served for many years in ministry and are retired. All six participants were actively serving churches at the time of the project.

An invitation to respond to the project survey (Appendix A) was sent by email to the clergy of the ERD at the beginning of the project. Seventeen clergy responded to the survey. The survey provided data that gave insight into the practice of private prayer and the experience of burnout and the experience of joy in the lives of the clergy of the ERD.

The six modules of the workshop were conducted at the United Methodist Church of Nokomis on Tuesday mornings. Each module was ninety minutes in length. Appropriate breaks and refreshments were provided for the participants to provide a comfortable learning atmosphere.

The workshop modules were composed of lecture-style teaching and group discussions. The topics of the six modules were:

1. Burnout and Prayer in the Life of Clergy
2. Biblical Foundations: Abiding in Jesus Through Prayer
3. Historical Foundations: John Wesley and the Early Methodists
4. Theological Foundations: A Theology of Prayer
5. Interdisciplinary Foundations: Neuroscience and Prayer
6. Next Steps in a Lifestyle of Abiding in Jesus Through Prayer

Teaching the foundation chapters as modules made for an orderly presentation of my research and allowed for beneficial group discussion of each topic.

Module one began with prayer and introductions. The project schedule, focused journaling assignments, and data collection tools were explained to the participants.

Participants were asked to read and sign the “informed consent” agreements and complete their pre-project questionnaires (Appendix B). The module one lesson presented research data regarding clergy burnout and an introduction to the practice of centering prayer. This module set the stage for the remainder of the project by presenting data that revealed the reality of the problem of clergy burnout and presented an introduction to centering prayer, which the participants would be asked to practice daily during the project. Instructions and journal booklets for the daily focused journaling assignments were given to the participants. The module closed with a time for discussion, questions, and prayer.

Module two began with the participants sharing “glory sightings of God at work” and prayer. The module two lesson, “Biblical Foundations: Abiding in Jesus Through Prayer”, presented insights from the exegetical research of John 15:1-17. This lesson revealed the importance of living in an abiding relationship with Jesus through which a person can experience Jesus’ joy in life and ministry. The lesson further taught that a devoted prayer life is an essential means of grace that can help clergy live in an abiding relationship with Jesus. Module two concluded with a time for group discussion, questions, focused journaling assignment instructions, and prayer.

Module three began with the participants sharing “glory sightings of God at work” and prayer. The module three lesson, “Historical Foundations: John Wesley and the Early Methodists,” presented insights from the life of John Wesley, which revealed his personal struggle with spiritual discouragement and his desire to experience joy. The lesson further revealed John Wesley’s understanding of the importance of a devoted prayer life and his instructions for the early Methodist laity and clergy to practice a

devoted prayer life. Module three concluded with a time for group discussion, questions, focused journaling assignment instructions, and prayer.

“Theological Foundations: A Theology of Prayer,” module four, began with the participants sharing “glory sightings of God at work” and prayer. The lesson of module four presented insights from ancient and contemporary theological contributions that relate to a Christian theology of prayer with a specific focus on Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and the Moravian movement. Zinzendorf and the Moravians devoted themselves to prayer and through this devoted prayer life experienced power and joy for life and ministry even though they faced challenging circumstances. By exploring other theological contributions this project gained insight into understanding prayer as a conversation and an abiding communion with God through which we join God in His kingdom work. Prayer is also a means of experiencing healing for our whole being. Theological contributions also provided insight into the importance of the centrality of prayer and the need for prayer partners for clergy. Module four concluded with a time for group discussion, questions, focused journaling assignment instructions, and prayer.

Module five began with the participants sharing “glory sightings of God at work” and prayer. The module five lesson, “Interdisciplinary Foundations: Neuroscience and Prayer,” presented insights from the study of Neuroscience, neurotheology, neuroplasticity, contemplative spiritual disciplines, and mindful meditation. Neuroscience provided insight into how the human brain responds to negative and positive experiences and how the brain’s response affects the person’s mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Neuroplasticity informed the project by providing insight into how the brain heals, grows, and transforms in relation to negative and positive experiences.

Neurotheology informed the project by providing insight into how religious practices and spiritual beliefs influence the human brain. The study of contemplative spiritual disciplines and mindful meditation informed the project by providing insight into how contemplative spiritual practices and mindful meditation can positively affect the brain's neuroplasticity and the person's overall mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health. Module five concluded with a time for group discussion, questions, focused journaling assignment instructions, and prayer.

Module six began with the participants sharing "glory sightings of God at work" and prayer. In module six, "Next Steps in a Lifestyle of Abiding in Jesus Through Prayer," we reviewed learnings from the previous modules, shared insights gained, and addressed questions. The participants completed the post-project questionnaires and submitted their focused journaling assignment booklets, followed by a time of prayer. Focused individual interviews were conducted following module six.

The context associates and professional associates assisted in the project's implementation in various ways. One context associate assisted in the recruiting of participants and reviewing the appropriateness of the project for the context. One context associate assisted in the collection and analysis of the data. Three of the context associates were participants in the project workshop. The professional associates provided professional and academic guidance and support for the project.

Summary of Learning

The hypothesis for this project was that if clergy practice a devoted prayer life, then clergy will experience joy. The analysis of the four data points for this project

suggests some possible trends that support the hypothesis. The data reveals varying cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes that occurred in the participants because of the project.

Survey

The data gained from the survey seems to support the hypothesis of this project. There were seventeen respondents to the survey. One set of survey questions provided behavioral data regarding the respondents' practice of private prayer. When asked about the frequency of their practice of private prayer, fifteen (88.2%) of the respondents indicated that they pray daily (Figure 1).

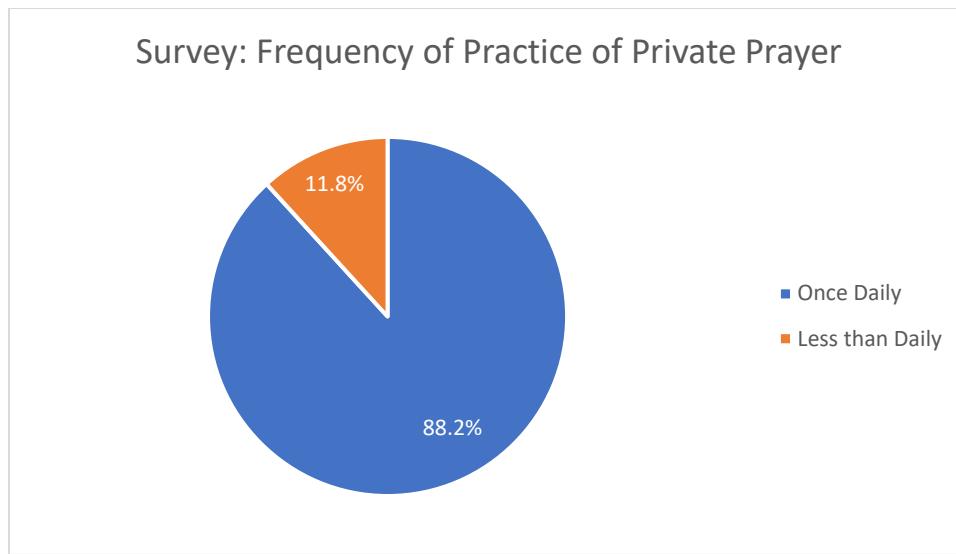


Figure 1. Survey: Frequency of the Respondents' Practice of Private Prayer

Eleven (64.7%) of the respondents indicated that their private prayers have a regular and orderly pattern (Figure 2).

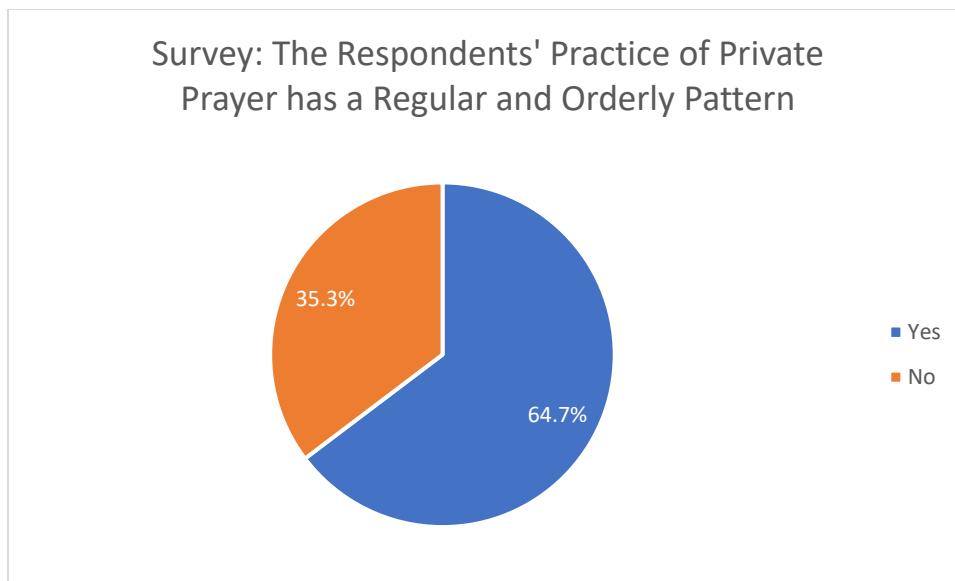


Figure 2. Survey: The Respondents' Practice of Private Prayer has a Regular and Orderly Pattern

Regarding the duration of their practice of private prayer, seven (41.2%) indicated that they pray for thirty minutes or more (Figure 3).

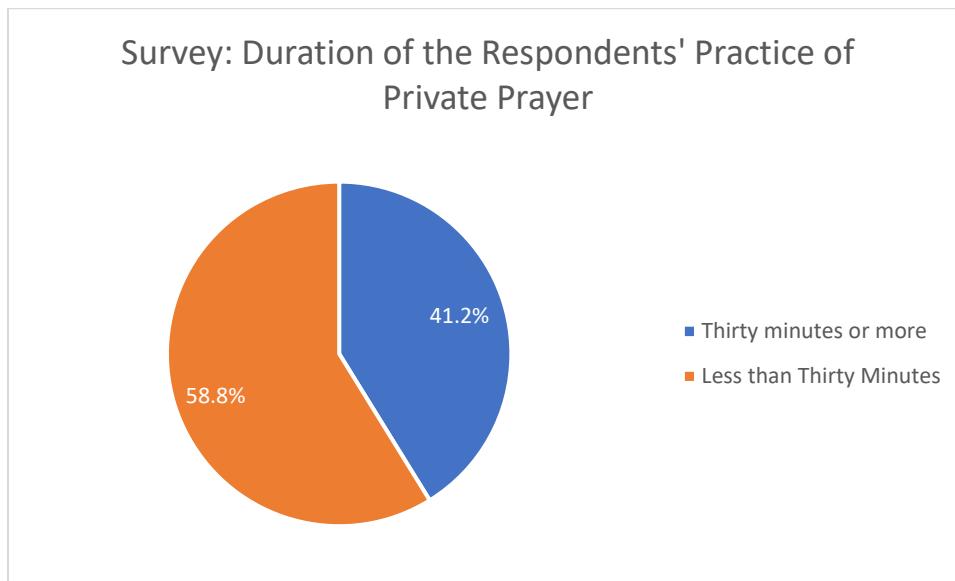


Figure 3. Survey: Duration of the Respondents' Practice of Private Prayer

When asked if they have prayer partners who pray for them, eleven (64.7%) of the respondents indicated that they do have prayer partners (Figure 4).

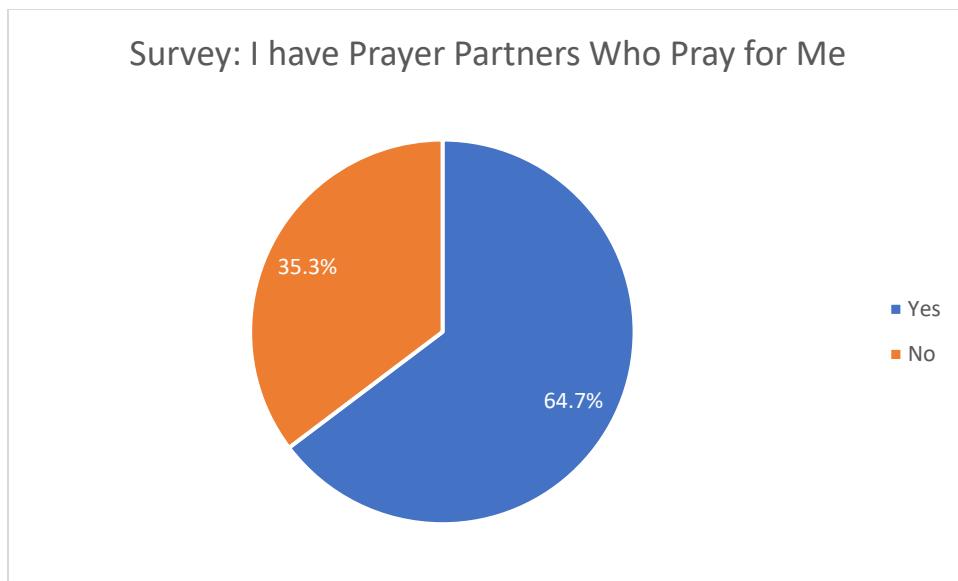


Figure 4. Survey: The Respondents Have Prayer Partners who Pray for Them

This data seems to indicate that the practice of private prayer has tremendous significance for these clergy.

The following survey questions provided affective data regarding their feelings about their ministries. In response to the statement, “I feel fulfilled in my ministry,” eleven (64.7%) indicated that they feel fulfilled in their ministries. Five (29.4%) stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. Only one (5.9%) indicated that they did not feel fulfilled in ministry. Figure 5 shows the findings.

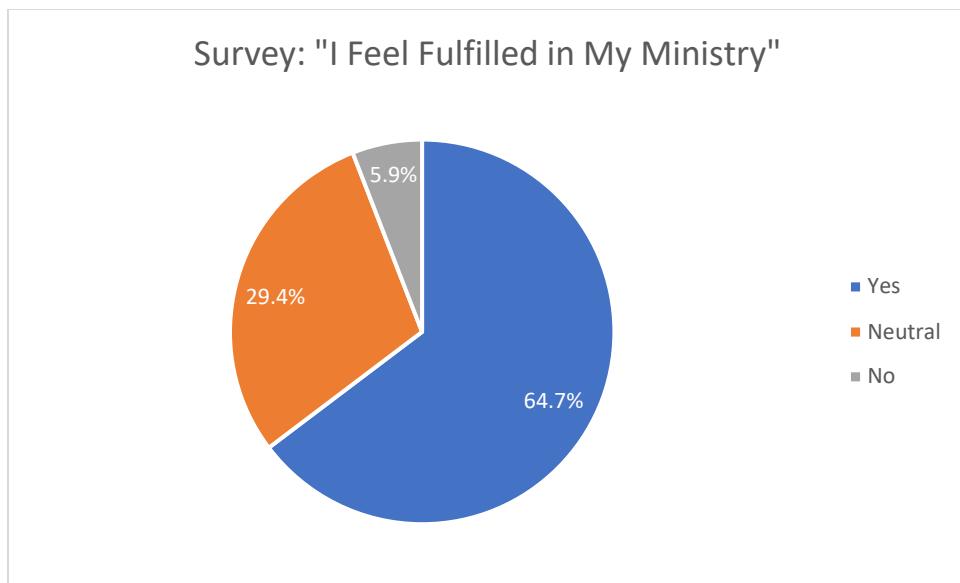


Figure 5. Survey: “I Feel Fulfilled in My Ministry”

In response to the statement, “I feel overworked in my ministry,” seven (41.2%) indicated that they do not feel overworked in their ministries. Seven (41.2%) stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. While three (17.6%) indicated that they do feel overworked in their ministries. Figure 6 shows these findings.

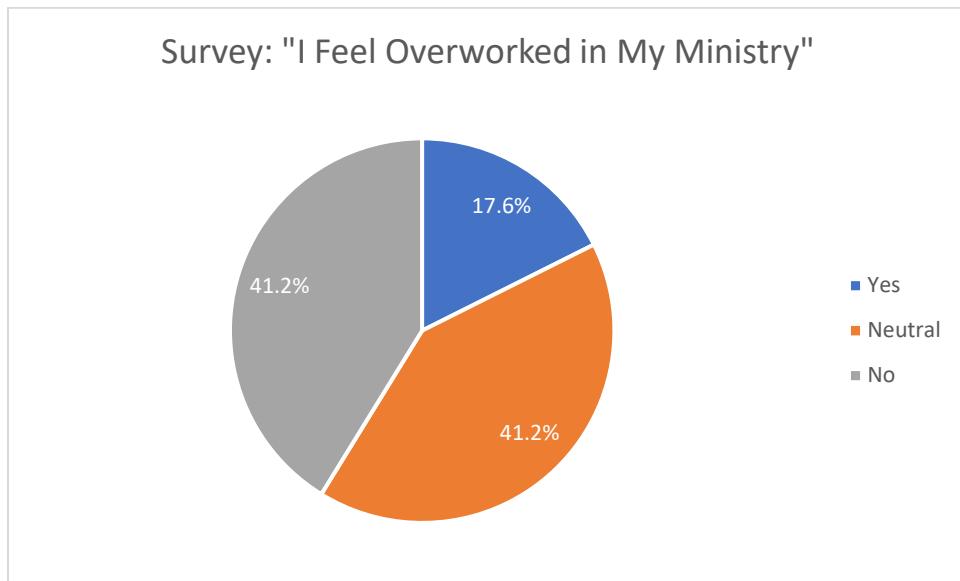


Figure 6. Survey: “I Feel Overworked in My Ministry”

When they responded to the statement, "I feel burned out in ministry," eight (47.1%) indicated that they do not feel burned out in ministry. Five (29.4%) stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. Four (23.5%) responded that they did feel burned out in ministry. Figure 7 shows the results.

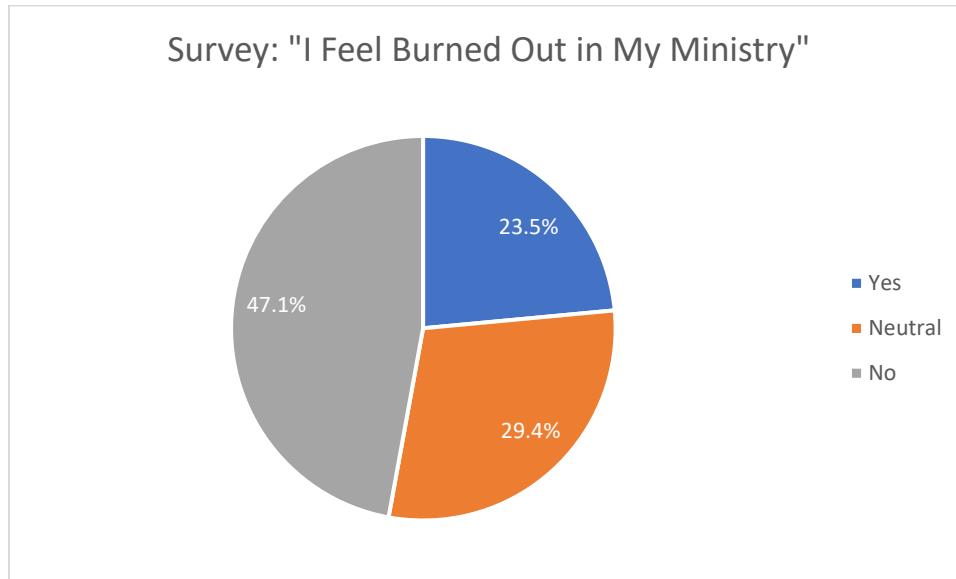


Figure 7. Survey: "I Feel Burned Out in My Ministry"

The next set of survey questions provided affective data regarding their feelings about the experience of the presence of Jesus and joy in relationship to the practice of private prayer. In response to the statement, "Prayer helps me keep my life balanced and joyful," fourteen (82.4%) of the respondents indicated that they agreed with the statement. The remaining three (17.6%) of the respondents stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. Figure 8 shows these results.

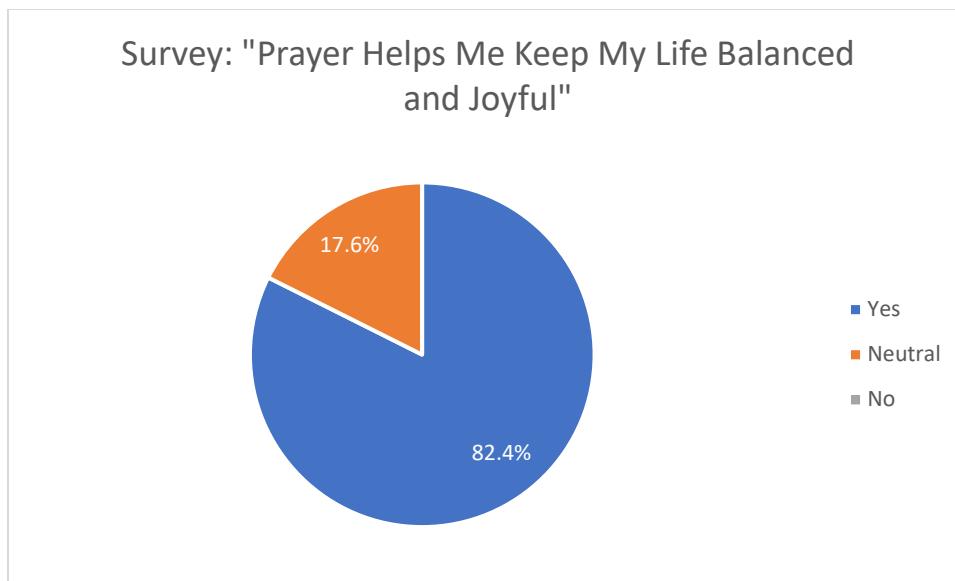


Figure 8: Survey: "Prayer Helps Me Keep My Life Balanced and Joyful"

When they responded to the statement, "When I pray, I feel joy," fourteen (82.4%) indicated that they do experience joy when they pray. Three (17.6%) of the respondents stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. Figure 9 shows the findings.

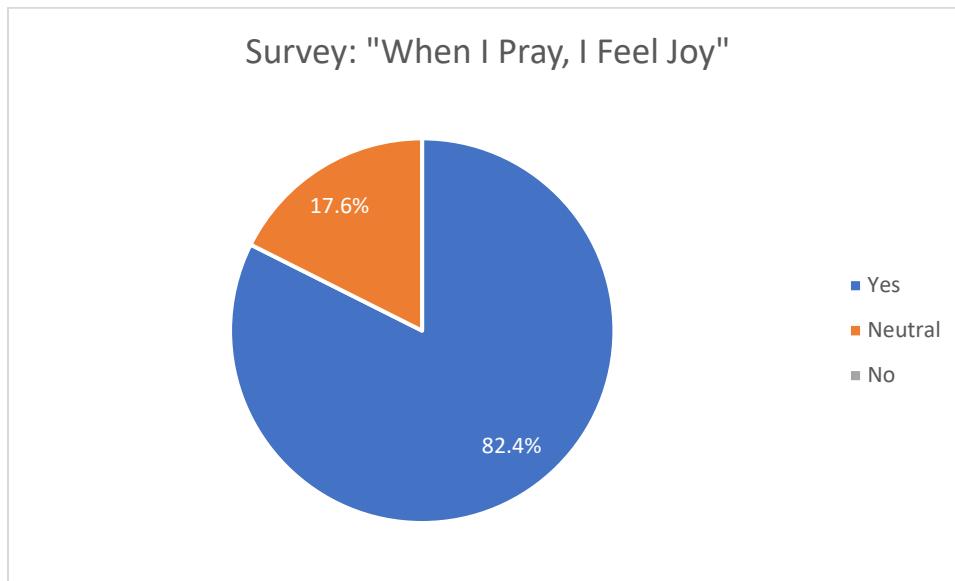


Figure 9. Survey: "When I Pray, I Feel Joy"

In response to the statement, “Through private prayer, I am able to experience the presence of Jesus,” fourteen (82.4%) indicated that they do experience the presence of Jesus through prayer. The remaining three (17.6%) of the respondents stated that they neither disagreed nor agreed with the statement. The results are shown in figure 10.

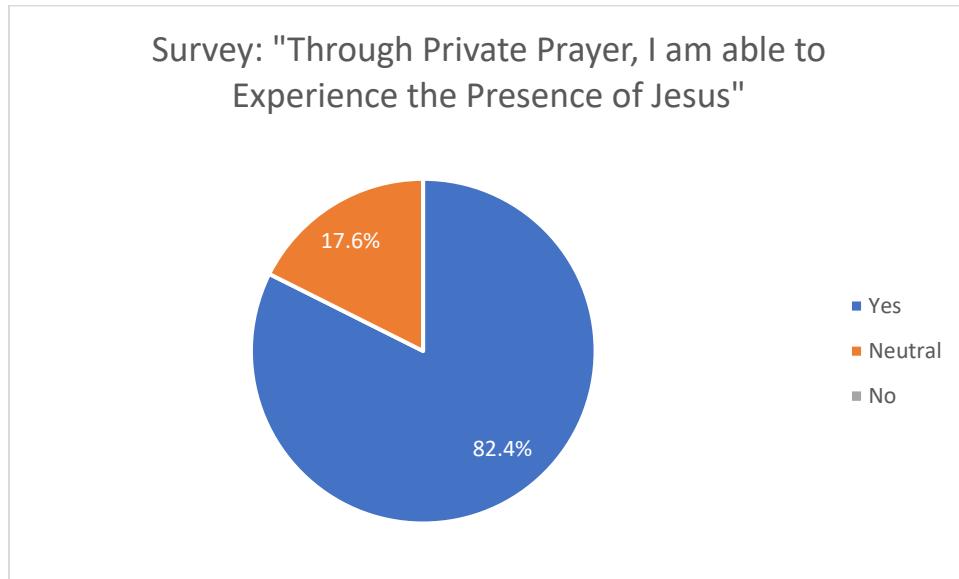


Figure 10. Survey: “Through Private Prayer, I am able to Experience the Presence of Jesus”

The overall trends of the survey responses support the hypothesis of this project. This data indicates that the practice of private prayer is an essential spiritual discipline in the lives of most of these clergy. Having prayer partners who pray for them is another important aspect of the prayer lives of most of these clergy.

The data seems to indicate a correlation between the practice of private prayer in the lives of these clergy and the higher degree of fulfillment in ministry and the lower degree of burnout in ministry. There also appears to be a correlation between the practice of private prayer and the higher degree of the experience of the presence of Jesus and the experience of joy.

Pre and Post-Project Questionnaires

All six of the workshop participants completed both the pre and post-project questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to measure behavioral, affective, and cognitive changes that occurred in the participants because of the project workshop. The following is a brief reflection on each of the questions and what the participants' responses seem to reveal.

The first two questions measured the behavioral changes of the participants. The first question asked the participants about the frequency of their practice of private prayer, "How often do you practice private prayer?" Three participants (50.0%) indicated they practice private prayer once daily. Three participants (50.0%) stated that they observe more than one private prayer time each day. Even though there was no change measured with this question, this data does reveal that the practice of private prayer was essential to all six participants. Figure 11 shows the responses.

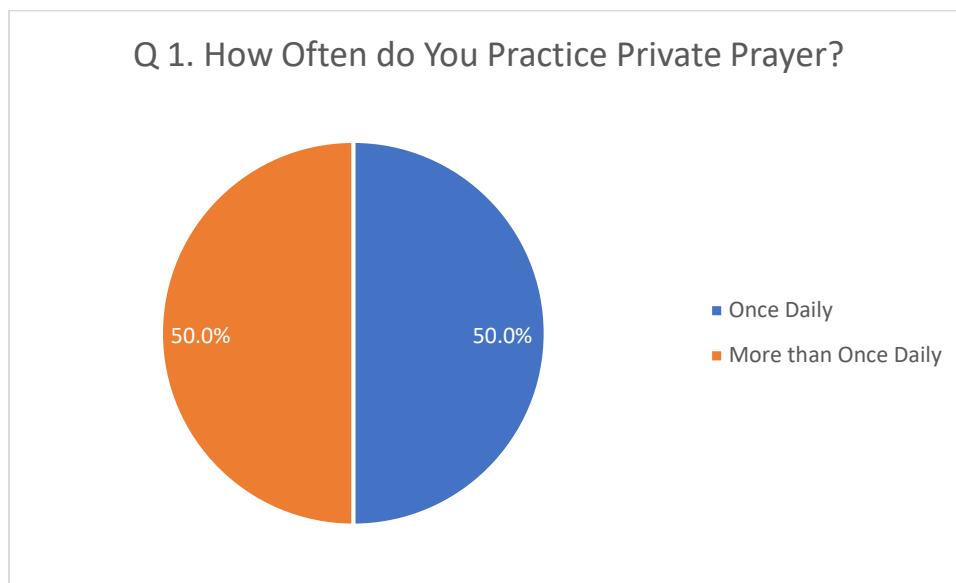


Figure 11. Frequency of the Practice of Private Prayer

The second question asked about the duration of their times of private prayer. Three participants (50%) indicated that the duration of their times of private prayer increased because of the project. Three participants' responses (50%) revealed no change in the duration of their times of private prayer because of the project. Figure 12 shows the findings.

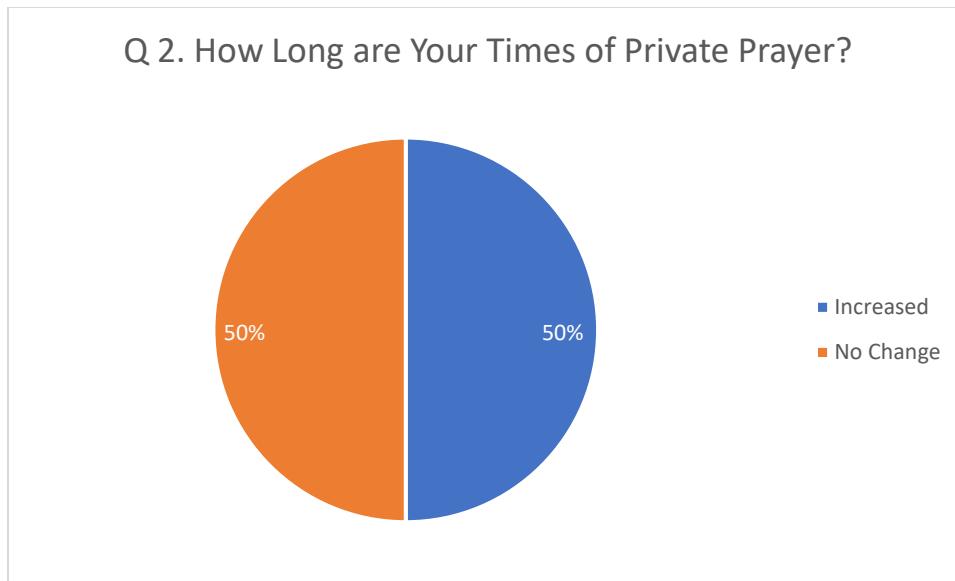


Figure 12. Behavioral Change in Duration of the Participants' Times of Private Prayer

The following two questions of the pre and post-questionnaires measured affective changes in the participants. Question three asked the participants to "Describe how the practice of private prayer makes you feel." The responses of five participants (83.3%) indicated a healthy change in how the practice of private prayer makes them feel. One participant (16.7%) did not show a change, but their responses to the pre and post-questionnaires indicated that the practice of private prayer produced healthy feelings for them. The responses to question three seem to indicate that the practice of private prayer does affect a person's feelings in a healthy manner. The results are shown in figure 13.

Q 3. Describe How the Practice of Private Prayer Makes You Feel.

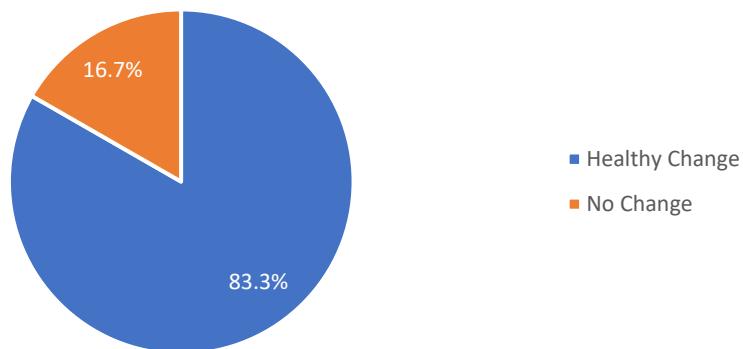


Figure 13. Affective Change in How the Practice of Private Prayer Makes the Participants Feel

Question four asked the participants to describe how pastoral ministry makes them feel. Four participants' responses (66.7%) indicated a healthy change in how pastoral ministry makes them feel. The responses of two of the participants (33.3%) did not indicate any change. Figure 14 shows the findings.

Q 4. Describe How Pastoral Ministry Makes You Feel.

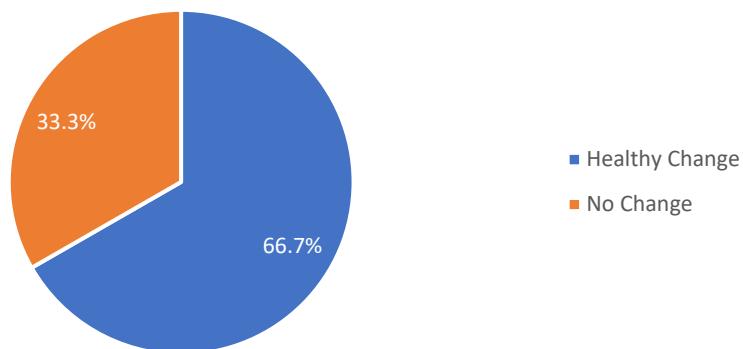


Figure 14. Affective Change in How the Practice of Ministry Makes the Participants Feel

The last three questions of the pre and post-questionnaires measure cognitive changes in the participants. Question five of the pre and post-questionnaire asked, “What does the phrase, ‘abiding in Jesus’ mean to you?” The responses of all six participants (100%) indicated that they had a better understanding of the phrase because of the project. One participant stated on the pre-questionnaire that the phrase meant “living for Jesus in mind, body, and soul.” This statement focused on the activity of the participant. The same participant stated on the post-questionnaire that the phrase meant “staying in the presence of God.” This statement focused on the being of the participant in relation to the presence of God. The results of question five are shown in figure 15.

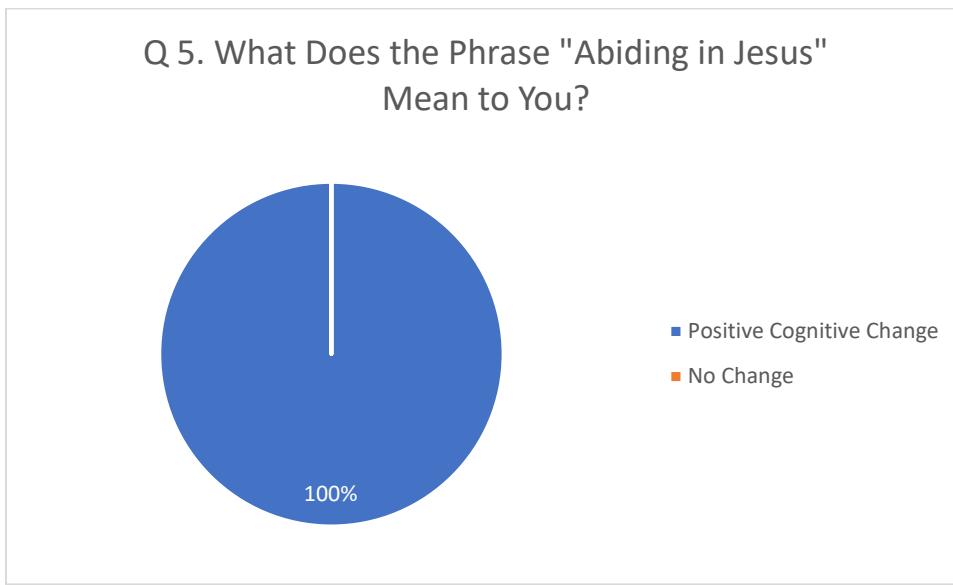


Figure 15. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “Abiding in Jesus”

Question six of the pre and post-questionnaire asked, “What does the phrase, ‘centering prayer’ mean to you?” The responses of all six participants (100%) indicated that they had a better understanding of the phrase because of the project. Each participant grew in the understanding that centering prayer is about focusing on the presence of Jesus Christ. One participant stated on the post-questionnaire that centering prayer meant

“opening myself up to Christ’s coming to me as I stay before His presence.” Figure 16 shows the findings.

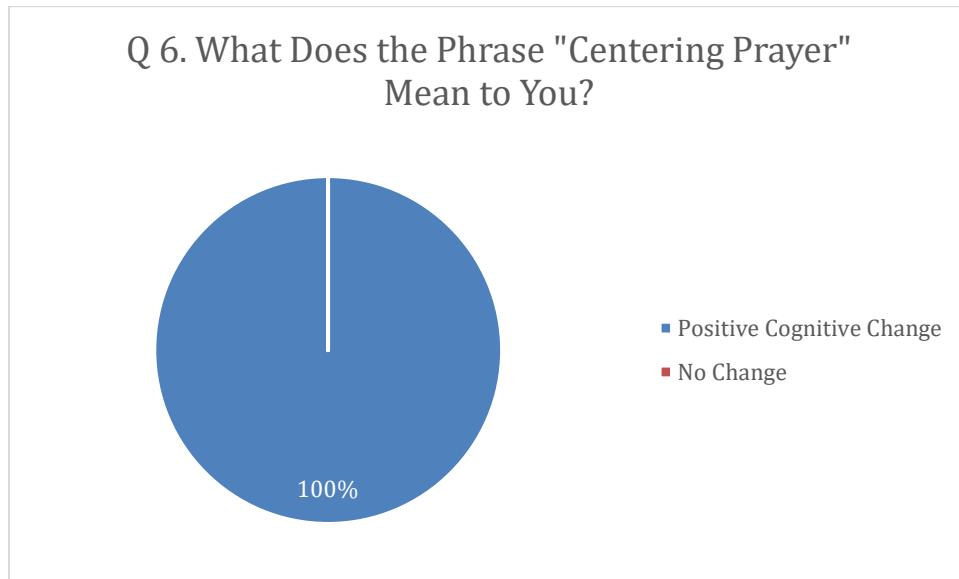


Figure 16. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “Centering Prayer”

Question seven of the pre and post-questionnaire asked, “What does the phrase, ‘so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete’ mean to you?” The responses of three participants (50%) indicated that they had a better understanding of the phrase because of the project. One participant stated on the post-questionnaire, “Contemplating this anchor verse during centering prayer has filled me with joy, knowing joy can coexist in me even during difficult times.” The responses of three participants (50%) indicated no change in their understanding of this phrase. Figure 17 shows the findings.

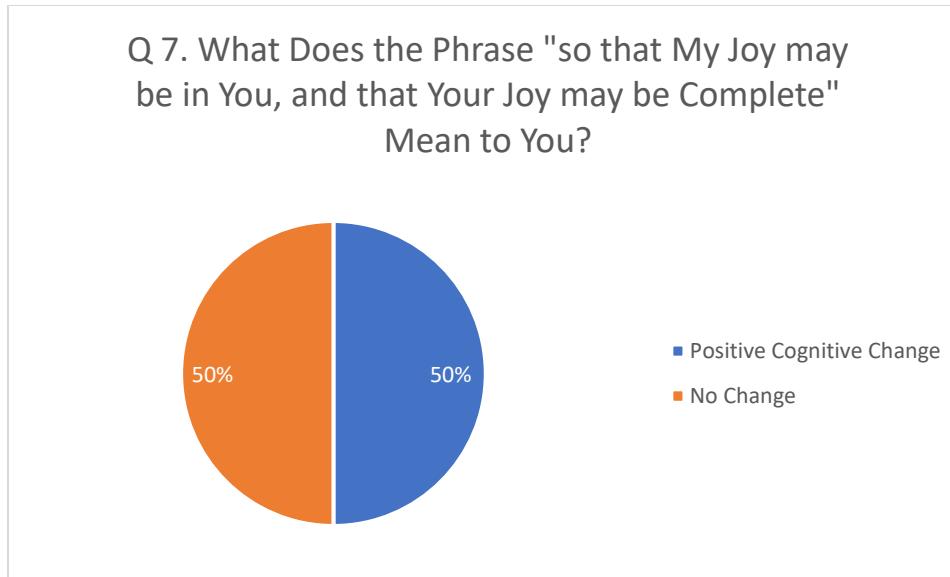


Figure 17. Cognitive Change in Understanding of the Phrase “so that My Joy may be in You, and that Your Joy may be Complete”

Journaling Assignments

The purpose of the focused journaling assignments was to evaluate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes in the participants resulting from their daily practice of centering prayer during the project. All six participants practiced daily centering prayer and recorded their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arose from their practice of centering prayer. Following is a summary of the participants’ journal entries and what their journal entries seem to reveal.

Participant #1

Participant #1 struggled with centering prayer at the beginning of the project. The participant recorded that they initially felt resistant and agitated toward the practice of

centering prayer. They were opposed to the thought of Jesus abiding in them and did not want closeness with Jesus through centering prayer.

As Participant #1 continued to practice centering prayer daily, they began to realize that Jesus was taking the initiative in establishing an abiding relationship with them. Centering prayer was not about them going to Jesus. Instead, centering prayer was about opening themselves to Jesus, who was coming to them. Centering prayer was becoming an experience of the prevenient grace of God for the participant.

On the sixteenth day of practicing centering prayer, Participant #1 recorded that they began to hear Jesus singing to them. This experience of hearing Jesus singing to them increased in frequency as the participant continued to practice centering prayer daily. Participant #1 recorded that the singing of Jesus conveyed that the participant was the Lord's child and that their identity and self-worth were found in Jesus. Jesus was singing about drawing the participant nearer to Jesus and celebrating the fellowship that was filled with joy and peace. The participant heard Jesus expressing that the very thought of the participant on the mind of Jesus filled the heart of Jesus with sweetness. Participant #1 recorded that they heard Jesus singing that He was singing these things to them so His joy may be in them, and their joy may be complete.

As Participant #1 continued practicing centering prayer, they expressed that they found themselves yearning for intimacy with Jesus. They recorded that they understood that abiding in Jesus was about being vulnerable, humble, and open to receiving Jesus who comes to them. The responses of Participant #1 indicate that they did grow in their knowledge of what it means to abide in Jesus and their understanding of the practice of

centering prayer. The responses of Participant #1 also indicate that their experience of joy increased as they continued to seek to abide in Jesus through centering prayer.

Participant #2

At the beginning of the project, Participant #2 practiced centering prayer for up to fifteen minutes at a time. As this participant continued to practice centering prayer, the duration of the times of prayer increased to twenty-five minutes regularly. There were a few occasions toward the end of the project when Participant #2 would spend one hour or more in centering prayer. This data indicates that Participant #2 experienced a behavioral change because of the project.

In the latter half of the project, Participant #2 began recording more expressions of their love for Jesus. They recorded that they were learning that Jesus had shown them how to abide in Him by His example of drawing away to quiet places to abide in the heavenly Father. One of the last entries Participant #2 records in their journal is that they grew in friendship with Jesus. Through this friendship with Jesus, they experienced Jesus expressing His love for them as He helped them grow in spirit. These responses of Participant #2 indicate that they experienced affective and cognitive changes because of the project.

Participant #3

Participant #3 struggled with centering prayer at the beginning of the project. They expressed that they had difficulty letting go of their busyness to sit at the feet of

Jesus. They found waiting in silence and concentrating to be difficult. Sometimes centering prayer felt more like a burden than a blessing to them.

About one-third of the way through the project, Participant #3 wrote that they experienced the gentle touch of Jesus. The desire to abide in the love of Jesus was beginning to arise within them. They prayed for Jesus to help them learn how to abide in Him. Nevertheless, they recorded that they continued to wrestle with their busy mind and compulsion to complete their work.

Midway through the project, Participant #3 began recording expressions of thankfulness for the joy of abiding in the love of Jesus. They gave thanks for even the small steps of growth Jesus was helping them take in experiencing His complete joy. They expressed their continued desire to experience the complete joy of Jesus that He promises to those who abide in Him.

As they continued to practice centering prayer, Participant #3 wrote about how they were beginning to realize that Jesus takes the initiative to abide in them. This realization was good news that helped remove the burden of their struggle to abide in Jesus. Toward the end of the project, Participant #3 began recording scripture references to the joy of the Lord and gave thanks for the Lord's gift of joy.

At the beginning of the project, Participant #3 stated that the duration of their centering prayers was from five to fifteen minutes. At the end of the project, the duration of their centering prayers had increased to twenty to thirty minutes. The data gained from Participant #3 indicates that they experienced cognitive, affective, and behavioral change because of the project.

Participant #4

Participant #4 was consistent with the duration of their practice of centering prayer at twenty minutes throughout the project. At the beginning of the project, they recorded that they were easily distracted by sounds during their times of centering prayer. They continued to faithfully practice centering prayer each day, even though they struggled initially.

After a few days of consistent times of centering prayer, Participant #4 began to write about feelings of the nearness of Jesus, of being embraced by God, and simply enjoying being with Jesus in the quietness of centering prayer. They expressed thanksgiving for the gift of the joy of Jesus, which they can experience even when they are feeling sad or discouraged. Participant #4 stated that abiding in Jesus helps them feel surrounded by God's love. They also recorded that being filled with the joy of Jesus helps them live for the glory of God and spread the love of Jesus.

In their last journal entry, Participant #4 wrote about how centering prayer had significantly helped them begin their days focusing on Jesus and experiencing His joy throughout the day. This data indicates that Participant #4 experienced cognitive change in their understanding of centering prayer and abiding in Jesus. The data also indicates that they experienced affective change because of the project.

Participant #5

Participant #5 was consistent in their daily practice of centering prayer ranging in duration from twenty to thirty-five minutes each time. However, they were very brief in their comments. Their journal entries did indicate that they were distracted and unsettled

on a few occasions. Most of their journal entries expressed that they experienced peace, contentment, thankfulness, love, trust, and joy by abiding in Jesus through centering prayer. The information from their journal indicates that they experienced some affective change because of the project.

Participant #6

Participant #6 was the only participant who practiced centering prayer in the morning and evening during the project. The duration of their times of centering prayer remained consistent at ten minutes each time. They recorded that they experienced peace, thankfulness, love, and joy as they basked in the presence of Jesus through centering prayer. Participant #6 expressed thankfulness that they could consistently experience the joy of Jesus in their soul no matter what may occur. They wrote that abiding in Jesus through centering prayer was the perfect way for them to begin and end their days. Each of their journal entries concluded with a word of thanksgiving to the Lord Jesus. The data gained from their journal entries indicates that Participant #6 did experience some affective change because of the project.

Post-Project Interviews

The purpose of the post-project interviews was to evaluate the effectiveness of the modules and provide information for possible future implementation of the modules. All six participants offered positive feedback regarding the effectiveness of the project modules. I will now summarize the interview responses and the insights they provide.

The first interview question asked, “Which module was the most helpful? Why?”

Three participants indicated that all the modules were helpful in their learning. One participant stated that the biblical foundations module was the most helpful because it provided a scriptural basis for the importance of prayer. Two participants stated that the historical foundations module was the most helpful because it provided new information that expanded their knowledge of John Wesley and the Early Methodists. One participant stated that the theological foundation module was most helpful because it helped them gain a deeper understanding of the spiritual discipline of prayer. Two participants stated that the interdisciplinary foundations module was the most helpful because it provided new insights into how prayer, especially contemplative prayer, can help heal the brain. These responses reveal that each of the modules was beneficial.

The second interview question asked, “Which module was least helpful? Why?” One participant indicated that the module on centering prayer was the least helpful because they tended to resist the methodology of centering prayer. Two participants indicated that the historical foundations module was the least helpful because they knew much of the material covered. The remaining three participants stated that they did not think any of the modules lacked in being helpful.

The third interview question asked, “Were the individual modules too long, too short, or of adequate length?” Five of the participants stated that each module was of adequate length. One participant stated that the modules were too short because they wanted to learn more.

The fourth interview question asked, “Was the length of the project as a whole too long, too short, or of adequate length?” Five of the participants stated that the project was

of adequate length. One participant stated that it was too short because they benefited from the teaching and group discussions.

The fifth interview question asked, “Is this project of value to offer to other clergy and ministry leaders? Why?” All six participants stated that the project is of value to other clergy and ministry leaders. The reasons given included that the project highlighted the importance of prayer and helped them grow in spirit and live in the presence of Jesus Christ.

The sixth interview question asked, “What was something new you learned from this project?” One participant stated that they learned about experiencing more joy through living in a deeper and more loving relationship with Jesus Christ. One participant stated that they learned that in centering prayer, Jesus Christ always sings to them. One participant stated that they learned new information about John Wesley. Two participants stated that the ability of the brain to heal itself, especially in relation to centering prayer, was new and exciting knowledge to them.

The seventh interview question asked, “What was the most meaningful part of the project?” Four participants stated that the daily practice of centering prayer was the most meaningful part because it drew them closer to Jesus Christ and helped them listen to Him. One participant said the most meaningful part was hearing Jesus Christ sing to them during centering prayer.

The last interview question asked, “Will you use what you have learned from the project in the future?” Three participants stated that they would continue to practice centering prayer. Four participants stated that they want to teach others about the concepts learned.

The interview responses of the project participants were encouraging. The responses validate the benefit of the project. They also give insights into how the project can be improved for future use.

Conclusion

Overall, the project went well. The collection of the data was easy. I wish that there would have been more respondents to the survey and more participants in the workshop for a more comprehensive data pool. However, the data collected helped test my hypothesis.

The ministry focus study was beneficial for this project. This research provided data revealing challenges to pastoral ministry in the project context that can lead clergy to experience burnout. This study also helped me reflect upon my interest and skills, revealing how I might research the problem of clergy burnout and test my hypothesis that would offer discoveries that will benefit clergy in the future.

The research for each foundation paper provided an insightful foundation for my hypothesis. The study of John 15:1-17 beautifully describes the abiding relationship Jesus Christ invites a person to have in Him. A relationship in which a person can experience the joy of Jesus Christ. John 15:1-17 has significant implications for clergy who do not experience joy because they feel burned out in ministry.

I enjoyed learning more about the life of John Wesley, primarily focusing on his prayer life. Wesley struggled to experience joy in his spirit and ministry in his early years. His spiritual discipline of prayer became an essential means through which he experienced the presence and joy of Jesus Christ. The example of Wesley's life of prayer

and his call for the people called Methodists, especially the Methodists clergy, to be a people of prayer is a vital lesson we need today.

The research into the theology of prayer was rich and enlightening. This study broadened my understanding of prayer. It provided a solid foundation for how prayer is a vital means of grace through which a person can abide in Jesus Christ and experience the joy of Jesus.

I especially enjoyed my interdisciplinary research in the field of neuroscience. This research provided significant insight into how prayer can be a vital means of grace through which a person can experience healing, growth, and transformation in their brain. Through the consistent practice of contemplative spiritual disciplines, like centering prayer, the brain can heal, grow, and transform in such a manner that will help the person experience improved mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical health.

The project survey provided insightful data from the clergy of the ERD, which was the context for the project. The survey supported my hypothesis by showing that there appears to be a correlation between a devoted prayer life and the experience of joy. It was encouraging to discover that most of the survey respondents who serve churches in a context where burnout can be a reality do practice a devoted prayer life which they claim helps them keep their lives balanced and joyful.

The pre and post-project questionnaires also provided data that supports my hypothesis. The daily practice of private prayer was an essential spiritual discipline for each of the six participants. It was significant to see that fifty percent of the participants stated that the duration of their times of private prayer increased because of the project. It was especially significant to see how most of the participants' responses documented a

positive change in how prayer made them feel and how they felt about pastoral ministry because of the project.

The focused journal assignments were beneficial for the project. The daily journal entries of the participants revealed a progression of change over the entire span of the project, especially regarding the behavioral and affective changes that occurred in the participants. I did like giving the participants the freedom to record their thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arose from the practice of centering prayer. However, one thing I would change with the journal assignments is asking a few directed questions for the participants to consider.

The individual interview responses of the participants affirmed the value of the project. The participants' interview responses were a significant source of encouragement regarding my hypothesis and the project. In future interviews, I would like to ask more specific questions about the cognitive, affective, and behavioral changes experienced by the participants to gain more data.

The data gained from the project participants reveals that the project positively impacted their lives. The responses from those who stated that they would use the insights they gained from the project to teach others give me hope that this project will impact the broader context in the future. However, I believe the project had a limited impact on the broader context because of fewer participants than I had hoped.

In the future, I believe it would be beneficial to offer the project to clergy and laity in ministry leadership in general. The work of ministry, especially in leadership roles, is challenging for clergy and laity who serve in leadership roles. This project has

value for anyone who serves in ministry leadership roles. This project could be beneficial for the spiritual development of any person, not only those in leadership roles.

In the future, I want to use this ministry to mentor and encourage clergy in their spiritual well-being. I also want to tailor it to be a valuable resource for the spiritual journey of any person. I look forward to how the Holy Spirit will continue to enlighten me in this ministry and how it can be a blessing to others.

APPENDIX A
SURVEY QUESTIONS

Survey

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree/Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
1. I practice private prayer daily.	1	2	3	4	5
2. When I pray alone, I pray for thirty minutes or more.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I feel overworked in my ministry.	1	2	3	4	5
4. When I pray, I feel joy.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My private prayers have a regular and orderly pattern.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Through private prayer I am able to experience the presence of Jesus.	1	2	3	4	5
7. I have prayer partners who pray for me.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I feel burned out in my ministry.	1	2	3	4	5
9. When I pray alone, I pray for less than thirty minutes.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Prayer helps me keep my life balanced and joyful.	1	2	3	4	5
11. When I pray alone, I have a ritual that I practice.	1	2	3	4	5
12. I feel fulfilled in my ministry.	1	2	3	4	5
13. I pray daily.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX B

PRE AND POST-PROJECT QUESTIONNAIRES

How often do you practice private prayer?

How long are your times of private prayer?

Describe how the practice of private prayer makes you feel.

Describe how pastoral ministry makes you feel.

What does the phrase, “abiding in Jesus” mean to you?

What does the phrase, “centering prayer” mean to you?

What does the phrase, “so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete” mean to you?

APPENDIX C

FOCUSED JOURNALING ASSIGNMENTS

Week 1:

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily

Anchor verse: John 15:4a

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experience that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

Week 2:

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily

Anchor verse: John 15:9

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experience that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

Week 3:

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily

Anchor verse: John 15:11

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experience that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

Week 4:

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily

Anchor verse: John 15:4a

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experience that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

Week 5:

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily

Anchor verse: John 15:11

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experience that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

APPENDIX D

FOCUSED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Which module was the most helpful? Why?

Which module was the least helpful? Why?

Were the individual modules too long, too short, or of adequate length? Explain your answer.

Was the length of the project as a whole too long, too short, or of adequate length?

Explain your answer.

Is this project of value to offer to other clergy and ministry leaders? Why?

What was something new you learned from the project?

What was the most meaningful part of the project?

Will you use what you have learned from the project in the future? Explain your answer.

APPENDIX E

MODULE TWO GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

MODULE #2**BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS:
ABIDING IN JESUS THROUGH PRAYER****SHARING GLORY SIGHTINGS OF GOD AT WORK AND OPENING PRAYER****SCRIPTURE**

John 15:1-17

15 I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower.² He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.³ You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you.⁴ Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.⁷ If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.⁸ My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples.⁹ As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love.¹¹ I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

¹² This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you.¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name.¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.¹

¹ Jn 15:1-17, New Revised Standard Version. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Authorship: The Beloved Disciple (John 19:35; 21:24). It is commonly understood by scholars that the Beloved Disciple was a person who was a follower of Jesus but not one of the twelve disciples.² The author is commonly referred to by scholars as the Fourth Evangelist.³

Date: 90-100 CE⁴ (The date range widely accepted by scholars)

Location: Ephesus⁵ (Traditional location accepted by most scholars)

Historical Context: It was a time of turmoil and conflict between the Jewish people who opposed Jesus and the Jewish people who believed Jesus was the Messiah.⁶

Purpose of the Gospel of John: John 20:30-31. The Fourth Evangelist primarily writes to encourage Christians, especially Jewish Christians, to remain faithful in their discipleship with Jesus as they lived in the persecution from the Jewish people who did not believe Jesus was the Messiah.

² Joel B. Green and Scot McKnight, eds. et al., *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 370.

³ Leander E. Keck, ed. et al. *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9, Luke-John (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995), 502.

⁴ John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., *The Oxford Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 961.

⁵ Green, 371.

⁶ D. Moody Smith, *Abingdon New Testament Commentaries: John* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 38.

LITERARY CONTEXT

The Farewell Meal and Discourse: John 13:1-17:26

The Farewell Meal and Discourse is composed of three units of which John 14:1-16:33 is the centerpiece.⁷ The Farewell Discourse can be divided into four subunits: John 14:1-31; 15:1-17; 15:18-16:4a; and 16:4b-33. These subunits were composed by the Fourth Evangelist to interpret the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and the future life of the disciples in relationship with the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.⁸ Within the Farewell Meal and Discourse, the Fourth Evangelist highlights in John 15:1-17 the importance of abiding communion with Jesus through which disciples will be enabled to accomplish the mission to which Jesus calls them.

The Immediate Context of John 15:1-17

In the immediate context of John 15:1-17, the three preceding paragraphs of John 14:15-31 focus on Jesus speaking about the connection between love for and obedience to Jesus and the presence of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit among and within disciples. The three paragraphs of John 15:18-16:4a that follow John 15:1-17 focus on the hatred of the world expressed toward Jesus, the Father, and disciples, with the promise that the Advocate, who is the Holy Spirit, will help the disciples testify of Jesus as they live in the world that hates Him.

⁷ Keck, 735.

⁸ C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 399, <https://doi-org.dtl.idm.oclc.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520334>.

John 15:1-17

The structure of John 15:1-17 can be illustrated in the following outline:

- I. Abiding in Jesus (15:1-11)
 - a. The true vine and the vine grower (1)
 - b. The work of the vine grower (2-3)
 - c. Disciples are to abide in Jesus (4-8)
 - d. Disciples are to abide in the love of Jesus and the Father (9-11)

- II. Loving as Jesus Loves (15:12-17)
 - a. Jesus exemplifies sacrificial love (12-13)
 - b. Love expressed through obedience (14-15)
 - c. Disciples are to go and bear fruit (16-17)

Group discussion of keywords/phrases/themes of John 15:1-17

“I Am”

The True Vine

The Vine Grower

Abide

Bear Fruit

Obedience and Love... Love and Obedience

Prayer

Joy

FOCUSED JOURNALING ASSIGNMENT FOR WEEK 2

Practice 20 minutes of Centering Prayer daily.

Anchor verse: John 15:9, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.”

Record the date, time, and length of time that you practiced centering prayer.

Write in your project journal about your thoughts, feelings, and experiences that arise from your practice of centering prayer.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND QUESTIONS**PRAYER**

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